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2005 YEAR IN REVIEW

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Timeshift

The inside scoop on Atari's impressive first Xbox 360 game

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TREE

Art by: **LeSean Thomas**

Letter from the Editor

And the winner is...

You'll soon discover that this issue doesn't contain your usual dose of Play, for which there are several reasons. One: The quicker we finish this one—our last of the year—the sooner we can begin our holiday break, the only 2-3 weeks of normal existence we get each year. Two: By this time each year pretty much everything has gone to retail aside from a few stragglers and the odd '06 preview—since this is also the time the game industry hits the snooze button before the storm that is Q1, followed by (collective gulp) E3. Three: We're going to attempt a redesign of sorts to go along with our new format, which will begin taking shape throughout the first half of the new year. And finally: it's the year in review issue, which always takes forever, as we dig out a year's worth of games, play our brains out, and then argue for two weeks—although I must admit this year was easier than most.

Be sure to check out cool-cat Steve Losey's JD Fortune interview, have a look at Viewtiful Joe's anime debut, and Activision's exciting new X-Men game, X3—their best yet. And make sure to stop by the web site (www.playmagazine.com) and vote for your game of the year. We'll announce our reader Game of the Year next month. Congratulations to God of War and all this year's esteemed winners... And cue hibernation mode.

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play magazine staff

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ALL GUNS BLAZING

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M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Strong Language
Violence

XBOX

PlayStation.2

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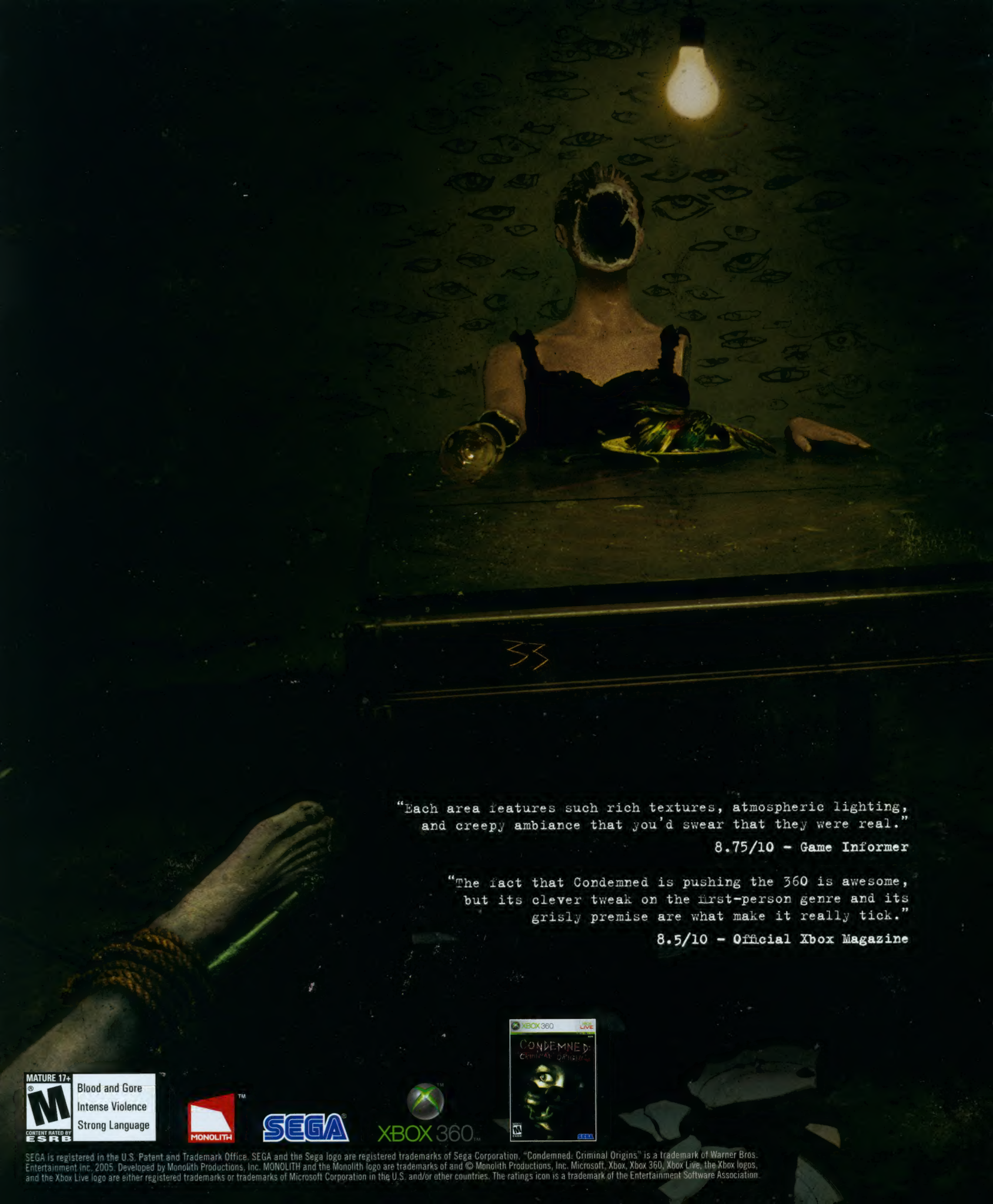

"Each area features such rich textures, atmospheric lighting, and creepy ambiance that you'd swear that they were real."

8.75/10 - Game Informer

"The fact that Condemned is pushing the 360 is awesome, but its clever tweak on the first-person genre and its grisly premise are what make it really tick."

8.5/10 - Official Xbox Magazine

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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KING KONG: NONE MORE BLACK

Ubisoft president tells BBC: "We have a problem on the 360"

King Kong for Xbox 360 is too dark on regular TVs, Ubisoft President Yves Guillemot recently told the BBC news Web site.

"We have a problem on the 360," Guillemot said during an interview with the site. "The screen is dark on some TVs and it totally changes the experience. When it's dark, you don't see where you have to go."

Guillemot was referring specifically to standard, non-HD TVs. He suggested the problems originated when the game's development team used high-definition TVs instead of the standard TVs most video games are currently played on.

"I'm a bit disappointed that we didn't see it when we were developing the game," he said. "It is the beginning of the high-definition TV era for us. It's a shame, but it happens with new machines. I don't think we will have it anymore."

Ubisoft is looking into ways to fix the code, he said. As of press time, no patch for the game has been issued.

Fans of King Kong should look to the Xbox and PlayStation versions of the game, he said. "When you play on an Xbox or a PlayStation 2, you start to see that [King Kong] is beautiful."

After the statement, Ubisoft's public relations staff stated the comments were taken out of context, and that the company stands by the quality of King Kong. They further acknowledged there were problems with the game on some plasma TVs, but suggested the problem may be localized to PAL versions of the game, as Guillemot was speaking to the British media.

NEWS BLURBS

–EA has aggressively addressed the serious Franchise Mode bug in Madden NFL 06 for PSP by actually offering replacements for the game, as well as coupons for future purchases.

–Hideo Kojima recently alluded that an entirely new, and perhaps even quite radical, version of Metal Gear will be showing up on PSP. The game is not a remake or part of the Acid series.

–Your search for Xbox 360 get a little out of hand? Did the bundle fiasco keep you out of the running altogether? In an interesting turn, Best Buy's president of retail in North America, Brian Dunn, wrote a letter of apology for the way his particular retail stores handled the frantic launch, offering a return policy and addressing the pressure tactics that went along with the purchase of the core system.

–According to eBay president and CEO Meg Whitman, of the roughly 400,000 units sent to retailers for the launch of Xbox 360, a whopping 40,000 ended up on the auction block—some going for thousands of dollars.

–In the wake of a disappointing year for Majesco, the company decided to offload two of its big projects, The Darkness and Ghost Rider. The Darkness comes with especial interest, as it's being developed by Starbreeze, the team responsible for The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay.

CLINTON EXCITEMENT

Protecting the youth of America

There's no denying that the violent and sexual content of games is growing more explicit and convincing by the year, leading the visual sophistication of the upcoming next-gen hardware to make you wonder: just how far will it all go? Or just as important, how far are politicians prepared to go to address what is becoming a seriously vocal issue? Ever since the Hot Coffee incident, rhetoric in the Hillary Clinton camp has been heating up, and now the Senator from New York has officially acted. On December 16, Senators Hillary Clinton, Evan Bayh and Joe Lieberman filed what is being called the Family Entertainment Protection Act, which is designed to shield children under the age of 17 from buying, or renting, Mature and Adults Only content. In addition to fines and community service for those daring to break the law, the legislation also mentions the authority for the FTC to conduct random retail audits and report findings to Congress, as well as look into ratings practices by the ESRB. "The holiday season is a particularly important time to raise awareness of this issue. Video games are hot holiday items, and there are certainly wonderful games that help our children learn and increase hand and eye coordination. However, there are also games that are just not appropriate for our nation's youth," said Senator Clinton. "This bill will help empower parents by making sure their kids can't walk into a store and buy a video game that has graphic, violent and pornographic content."

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Virgin Megastore Top Ten

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03	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / ps2
04	**Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City** rockstar / psp
05	**NBA 2K6** 2k sports / ps2, xb, xb 360
06	**Star Wars: Battlefront 2** lucasarts / ps2, xb
07	**MVP 06: NCAA Basketball** ea / ps2, xb
08	**Matrix: Path of Neo** atari / xb, ps2
09	**Soul Calibur 3** namco / ps2
10	**FIFA 06** ea / psp

NPD/TRSTS Top Ten Nov. Game Sales

01	**Star Wars: Battlefront 2** lucasarts / xbox
02	**Star Wars: Battlefront 2** lucasarts / ps2
03	**Call of Duty 2** activision / xbox 360
04	**Madden NFL 06** ea / ps2
05	**WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2** thq / ps2
06	**Madden NFL 06** ea / xbox 360
07	**Tony Hawk's American Waseland** activision / ps2
08	**Mario Party 7** nintendo / gc
09	**50 Cent: Bulletproof** vivendi universal games / ps2
10	**Call of Duty 2: Big Red One** activision / ps2

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Ubisoft / xbox, ps2

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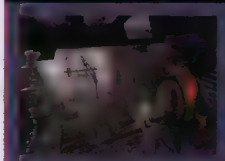

Mark Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure

He's managed to pump out a game as cool as his clothing line. Now that's rare.

Top Spin 2
2k sports / xbox 360

2K Sports Tennis with normal mapping and hopefully, for the first time, real likenesses.

Top 5 Now Playing and Reader Selections

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Readers' Most Wanted database@playmagazine.com

01	**Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** nintendo / gc
02	**Final Fantasy XII** square enix / ps2
03	**Kingdom Hearts II** square enix / ps2
04	**Metal Gear Solid 4** konami / ps3
05	**Resident Evil 5** capcom / ps3

Dave Halverson

01	**Kameo: Elements of Power** microsoft / xbox 360
02	**Okami** capcom / ps2
03	**Mega Man Maverick Hunter X** capcom / psp
04	**Black** ea / xbox
05	**Drill Dozer** nintendo / gba

Brady Fiechter

01	**Dragon Quest VIII** square enix / ps2
02	**Condemned: Criminal Origins** sega / xbox 360
03	**Kameo** microsoft / xbox 360
04	**Super Mario Strikers** nintendo / gc
05	**Mario Superstar Baseball** nintendo / gc

Greg Orlando

01	**Ape Escape Academy** sony / psp
02	**Advance Wars DS** nintendo / nintendo ds
03	**GUN** activision / xbox 360
04	**Grandia III** square enix / ps2
05	**Ridge Racer 6** namco / xbox 360

Michael Hobbs

01	**Mario Kart DS** nintendo / ds
02	**Super Mario Strikers** nintendo / gc
03	**Animal Crossing: Wide World** nintendo / ds
04	**Dragon Quest VIII** square enix / ps2
05	**Mario Superstar Baseball** nintendo / gc

Eric L. Patterson

01	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / gc
02	**Animal Crossing: Wild World** nintendo / ds
03	**Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan!** nintendo / ds
04	**Guitar Hero** red octane / ps2
05	**Mario Kart DS** nintendo / ds

Timeshift

Forces you to creatively rethink the way you play a first-person shooter...

Brady Fiechter

We often fear the ineffable passage of time as it barrels along with little regard to our feeble human wishes. It's no wonder the manipulation of time has often fed the dreams of our fiction, transporting us into the awesome reality such powers would bring. Games are our newest fiction, and what better place to be an omnipotent conductor of the wheels of time?

In the upcoming Xbox 360 and PC first-person shooter TimeShift, you play as recently widowed test pilot Michael Swift who, with the coveted technology known as the quantum suit, is capable of reversing, slowing and stopping the flow of time. "We have been working hard to integrate a new and compelling gameplay mechanic that forces the user to start thinking about first-person shooter gameplay in a new way," says Matt Karch, CEO of TimeShift developer Saber Interactive. "We have added a 4th dimension – time – to the mix that allows the player to approach first-person gameplay in an entirely new way. This has enabled us to do things that defy standard FPS convention. For example, when you encounter minefields or fire in most games your immediate reaction is to turn around and head the other way. In TimeShift we want you to go charging headfirst through fields of deadly mines or raging fires, using your time powers to survive."

Time can be screwed with basically whenever you find it necessary, dictated by a diminishing meter that gradually resets itself once depleted. See that impenetrable security grid through the spinning fans? Simply stop time and penetrate it. Need to get over that fence blocking your entrance to your next mission point? Perhaps you'll get really creative and find a way to displace an object, slow time and ride the rebounding physics. "At current count there are over 60 discrete time challenges in the game that really force you to think about which power to use at which time. We have tried to employ time much in the way that Half-Life 2 did physics," explains Karch. "Challenges have been crafted to specifically require proper application of the time powers. A good example of this is in one of the trike-riding sequences of the game. As the player races through a mountainous pass on his trike he encounters a draw bridge in the down position. At the far side of the bridge is a gate that blocks the player's path. The gate cannot be opened. After a little exploration the player learns that he can raise the bridge from a remote booth. It becomes clear that the only way past the gate is to ride the trike up onto the bridge and then raise the bridge and jump over them. Because the gates are opened remotely once the player raises the bridge he is stuck down below. This is where the time powers come in handy. He can ride the trike onto the bridge, go over to the booth to raise the bridge, stop time, activate the bridge during time stop and run back to the trike on the bridge before the effect ends. He could also use reversal for this challenge by raising the bridge and reversing time to bring it back down and getting on the bridge before it rises again. Once on the bridge, it is just a matter of

Notice the real-time lattice of lighting going on. Very nice...

"See that impenetrable security grid through the spinning fans? Simply stop time and penetrate it."

activating boost to catapult yourself over the gates."

Not every task will be this involved, but the relative variety of what you're facing is what's being honed to keep TimeShift humming along. "Another cool but simple challenge is what we refer to as the ridge puzzle," begins Karch. "In one small section of the game you are forced to walk on a narrow snow-covered bluff that overlooks a gorge. As you walk across the bluff, an enemy helicopter comes racing down the canyon in your direction. It fires its rockets at you, in the process loosening some of the packed ice that you need to walk across. It is now clear that you will not be able to get across the bluff without causing the loose ice to fall out from underneath you. Your best option here is to stop time as stopping time causes physical items to freeze in place. Once time is stopped you could quickly make your way across the ice."

It may be tempting to often reach for the stop-time mechanism, and when you're in the heat of battle, it's wicked fun to freeze the frame, run up and slaughter the guards with impunity. But slowing time takes on a completely different dynamic that must be carefully utilized. "The way the time controls mechanic is set up, slow is a much more abundant power than stop. It recharges more quickly and lasts almost 2.5 times as long," explains Karch. "For reasons of economy alone, slow is the more compelling power. A perfect example of where this applies is in one of our zeppelin-ride levels. As you are manning one of the large turrets onboard the zeppelin and battling jets in a canyon, a large number of air mines are released from a bomber overhead. The mines are attached to parachutes and flow in front of the zeppelin's path. As the zeppelin approaches, the mines detach from the parachutes and accelerate towards the zeppelin. The player needs to somehow slow down or shoot down the mines before they destroy the zeppelin. By using time stop the player will only have 5 seconds to shoot down the mines. While he may be able to get about 5 or 6 of them, they number on the dozens. By using time slow, however, the player has a full 12 seconds to aim and fire and destroy the closest mines first. Once the power is fully used up he can shoot at the ones in the distance while the power recharges."

Ok, so by now you might be wondering, and this was the first question I had before having the chance to see TimeShift in action: how is this not a gimmick? "When you speak of the ability to control time, most people immediately conjure up images of Max Payne grimacing in slow-motion as he fires his shotgun at a bunch of goons, or maybe more recently the hero in FEAR using his enhanced 'reflexes' to battle multiple opponents," responds Karch. "While this is visually cool, its gameplay value is fairly limited. One of the early obstacles we encountered in TimeShift was the impression that our implementation of the time control mechanic would be limited to a 'bullet time' type of power. It was only when we started to show the game in action that we were able to overcome these early concerns. In TimeShift, the player has the ability to not only slow down time but to stop and reverse time flow as well. When he uses such powers he continues to navigate the world in real-time; in other words he is immune from changes he causes to time. These powers are not used simply for battle situations but are also essential in solving in-game challenges. We have crafted the entire game world around the player's ability to manipulate time. Our weapons, opponents and environments have all been created with this time control mechanic in mind."

To me, what makes a gameplay mechanic truly compelling is when the player can have fun just messing around with the mechanic itself. It is cool to stop time completely and pump multiple shots into an enemy until he disintegrates into a spray of blood and gibs. It's also fun to toy

With a big emphasis on variety, the game moves from tight indoor corridors to vast outdoor landscapes.

"When you speak of the ability to control time, most people immediately conjure up images of Max Payne grimacing in slow-motion..." -Matt Karch

with the reversal power—to kill a bad guy, bring him back to life and nail him again.

While the progressive dynamic behind TimeShift is the key to opening new ways of enjoying the first-person action experience, obviously the game sticks to the basic FPS rules that always work. "We really wanted to expand upon an established genre and not create an entirely new one," says Karch. "We wanted the game to be very familiar to fans of first-person shooters but to give them something new and different that complements the shooting in a very compelling way. Thus, the whole idea of shooting and reloading, shields and weapons exchange is pretty traditional."

And of course you've got the assortment of weapons, augmented with alt fire, melee and a collection of grenades. "Two weapons stand out as personal favorites – the HellRazer and the MagCannon," says Karch. "The HellRazer looks sort of like a modified uzi with a gas canister attached to the side. In its primary mode of fire it shoots incendiary bullets that ignite opponents upon contact. In its alt-mode it serves as a flamethrower and is useful in battling multiple opponents at close range.

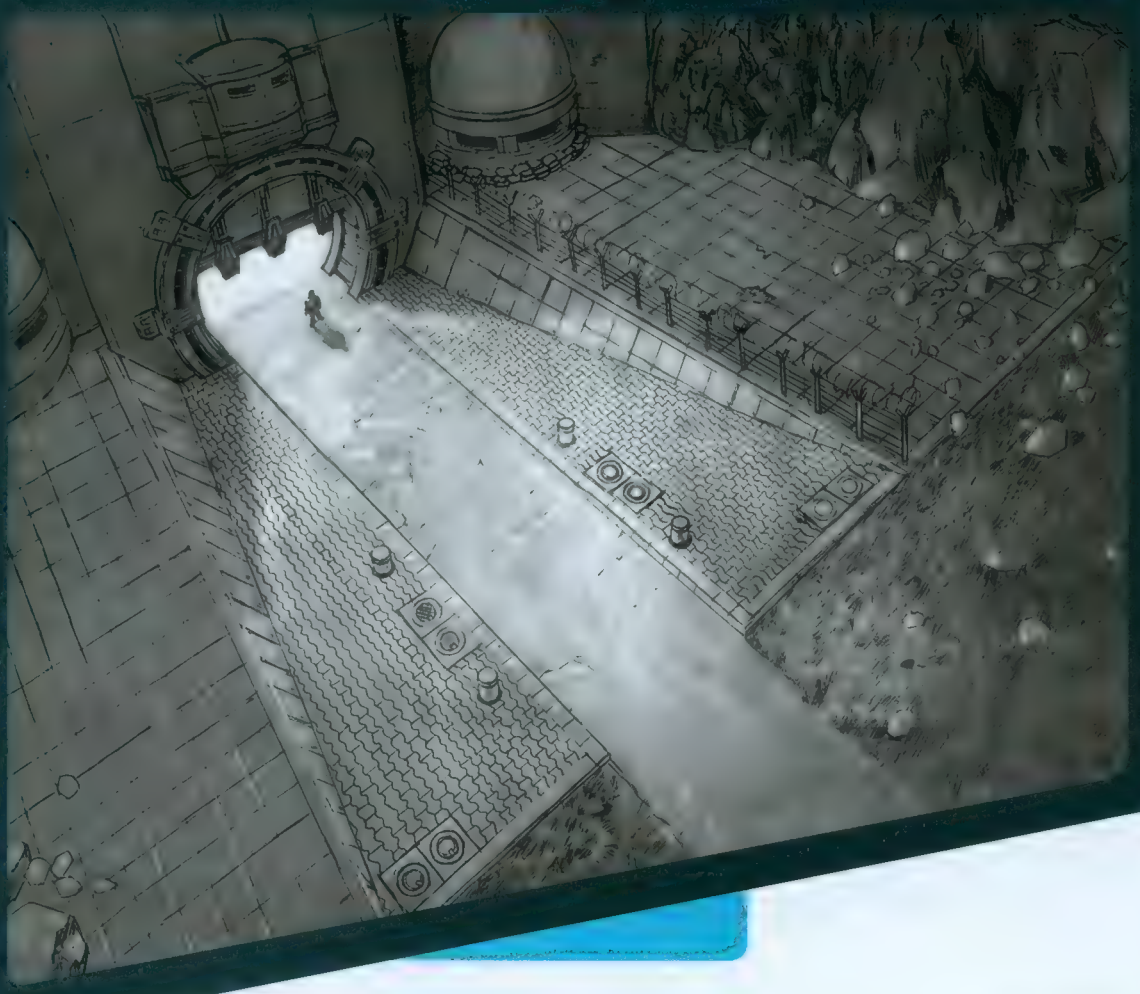
"The MagCannon is an energy-based weapon that shoots concentrated projectiles of energy. The cool thing about this weapon is that the projectiles are affected by gravity. Thus, the weapon can be used to drop projectiles on the heads of hiding opponents. As a side note, if you fire the weapon rapidly in the air the projectiles will fall down in a shower of fire that looks like fireworks – it is very cool. The alt-fire of the MagCannon concentrates all of the energy from a clip into a single charge that destroys everything within a given radius of its blast."

TimeShift's weapons inflict considerable damage too; this isn't a game going for subtle depictions of violence. "One of the reasons that people play first-person shooters is that they 'get to shoot someone.' Real life, fortunately, deprives us of such pleasures, so the virtual world is the perfect outlet for a good killing," begins Karch. "We feel that in order to make the experience a real visceral one we should include appropriate amounts of gore. We didn't want to go over the top like in Soldier of Fortune but wanted to make the visuals match the feel of the weapons. Thus with certain weapons you may just see some blood spurts while with other more powerful ones you see buckets o'gibs. It is also a lot of fun to play with the time powers during kills. You can gib an opponent into a hundred pieces and reverse him back together like a jigsaw puzzle. You can also have an opponent fly high into the air after an explosion, slow time and use your grenade launcher to propel his body higher and higher into the air."

The forceful depiction of your dirty work is, of course, a big component to its satisfaction. The enemy will stumble, fall back, grasp entrance wounds in pain, run around in a panic trying to extinguish fires and the like. "The key for us here was variety. The more variety we have the more believable the characters. Limited animations, especially with human opponents, make the experience grow old very quickly," admits Karch. "Thus we strived to have as many quality animations in the game as possible. One of our major innovations has been in the creation of a system through which our physics system talks to our animations system. This enables us to do such things as have opponents get up from ragdoll positions and to make all the interactions more believable."

Good stuff. But how do the enemies actually think, how do they sell their presence as truly formidable? "There are a few really impressive aspects of TimeShift's AI," boasts Karch. "One of the coolest features of the AI is the way they react to the time powers. When the player stops time and moves to another location, the AI loses him and is temporarily confused by his disappearance. Likewise when the player reverses time, the AI states are reversed as well, so that an opponent that has located the player can have his knowledge state reversed to a point before he spotted him.

"Another cool aspect of the AI is the way the opponents navigate the environment. Not only do they actively seek out hiding spots and pursue the player with efficient pathfinding, but they are also capable of dealing with physical changes to the environment. Let's say, for example that an opponent is hiding behind a crate. The player blows something up and the crate flies into the air and splinters into a thousand pieces. The AI knows that the crate has been destroyed and will no longer seek it out as a hiding spot. In other words, navigation data is continually



redrawn as the environment is altered by gun play. It is a pretty unique system and adds a real element of believability.

"In contrast to other games in the genre, our AI is not highly scripted; opponents do unexpected but logical things. They coordinate attacks, seek the player out when he is hiding and effectively hide themselves. The end result is a believable AI system that plays out differently every time you play. It is really very cool."

How TimeShift plays may be getting the most attention for originality, but the depiction of its strangely altered future is an equally willing ally to the immersion. "It is an incredible challenge to create an entire art-style from scratch," points out Karch. "Every item in the world needs to have the smallest detail, needs to be sketched out in advance for consistency with the game world. We have several full-time sketch artists who have been working for the length of the project sketching objects in the game's unique style to ensure that everything is consistent. It would have been much easier to create a game that was based on real-world imagery, but that would not have served the purpose we were trying to achieve by creating this unique world. We also wanted to make sure that there was plenty of variety in environments. Fighting in industrial areas can only be compelling for so long. I am not one to boast but I can say with confidence that we have more variety in terms of location than any recent AAA FPS to be released on the consoles or PC."

TimeShift's world is a crumbling, alternate version of a modern society, rearranged after our unwitting hero returns from a time traveling stint to 1911. His actions in the past have essentially wiped his present reality from existence, replacing what was once a peaceful, inviting place with the rule of a dictator named Ivan Krone. As Michael searches for the technology that will allow him to return to 1911 and right his wrongs, he must also deal with the haunting memories of his deceased wife—the main reason he decided to experiment with time travel to begin with.

Saber Interactive is reveling in its stylistic freedom of fantasy. "The feel that we are going for is one of oppression and controlled chaos," describes Karch. "The regime is firmly in command but is challenged by a group of rebels that survive by installing spies in the regime and stealing weapons and vehicles from the enemy... If history took a different path from the current one starting in 1911, it is very possible that the technologies of today would look very different than they do. It is possible that jets would have wings swept in reverse or that zeppelins would not have fallen out of favor as a means of transport. This is the reason for their inclusion in the game. Not only does it add substantially to the visuals of the game but it also enhances the story and the world that we have created to a great degree."

Would I be reading too far into the aesthetic to say there is a draw from old-world communism? "I am impressed that you picked up on the communist references," Karch comments. "Our goal was to create a world that felt oppressive—thus it has communist and fascist overtones. But we also wanted to create a world that looked as if it had come from another era. Since the history-altering event occurred in turn-of-the-century America, we have included Victorian elements in the style as well. The hard part for us was to merge these influences together into a coherent style. Based upon early reactions I think we have succeeded really well."

Within this sci-fi-meets-anime-meets-steam-punk universe, the inhabitants are as broadly drawn as their surroundings. "The game has a large number of cool opponents that range from humans, to hybrids to vehicle-based opponents. Many have been designed specifically to take advantage of the time shifting mechanic," Karch points out. "One of the opponents that I really like is called the Storm Guard. This opponent has a really unique look—it is a manufactured 'hybrid' that contains a combination of organic and synthetic materials. The Storm Guard possesses a shield that covers most of his body. This shield is nearly impenetrable. The only way to combat this opponent is to shoot at his exposed back. This is nearly an impossible feat during real-time combat. The best strategy is to use time control. By slowing or stopping time the player can immobilize the Storm Guard and rotate to his back side where he can kill him before normal time flow resumes. This is just one example of an opponent that interacts well with the time control mechanic."

TimeShift's strides to stand at the front of the first-person class are both obvious and subtle. Saber Interactive places a lot of emphasis on the growing criticism that the genre is in need of repair. Where exactly lies the biggest crack in the foundation? "In short: lack of innovation," says Karch. "While there have been some advances to the genre by combining mechanics from MMOs, RPGs, and even RTS games with FPS gameplay, little has been done to create new game mechanics that complement shooting. I'm not a big fan of the First-Person 'Sneaker' where I fail a mission because someone hits an alarm button. I'm also a little tired of WWII FPS games; I loved them at first, but after so many WWII releases I feel like I have been playing out war missions longer than the war actually lasted. I'm ready for something new and fresh.

"I feel like we have created something really special with TimeShift. We have poured all we have into this game and the results are really something that we are all proud of. I think it is going to be one of the early titles that defines the Xbox360." **play**

TimeShift

Xbox 360, PC

Point of Interest

Saber Interactive is based out of St. Petersburg, Russia.

Developer: Saber Interactive **Publisher:** Atari
Online: TBA **Available:** March

Yes, it looks really, really good.

"When we began development of TimeShift the goal was always to go next-gen"
-Matt Karch

360

What's it take?

Matt Karch, CEO, Saber Interactive

One of the primary challenges in developing for next generation consoles such as the X360 is the creation of high-resolution artwork. Every object and texture in the game needs to be modeled in high-resolution for optimal visuals. It also has to be modeled in a highly specific way to ensure that it looks as good as possible in the engine. When we began development of TimeShift, the goal was always to go next-gen. Thus we established our art pipelines very early in the process with the goal of having the game look great on very high-end PCs and next-generation consoles. The Xbox360 has a powerful ATI card in it and on the art-side the creation of artwork for high-end PCs and the Xbox360 is really identical. Even on the technology side there is really nothing that the Xbox360 can do that a high-end PC can't. The primary challenges that we faced for the X360 were really on the technology side. Because the X360 runs with multiple processors we needed to modify our engine by incorporating multi-threading to take advantage of all of that power. Everything else, all of the rendering features were already long in the works when we made the switch to the 360 from advanced parallax effects to distortion effects to advanced lighting. The nice thing about having your own tech is that the game takes on a really unique look. You may have noticed that many of the games coming out that are using one particular off-the-shelf engine all look somewhat similar. By using our own engine, with our own rendering technologies we can achieve a totally different look and feel.

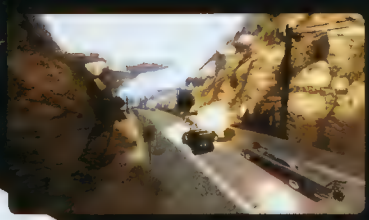
By this point, I wouldn't call our Xbox360 version a port – the game really has been developed specifically for the platform and in my opinion looks as good as, if not better than, anything currently released for the system.

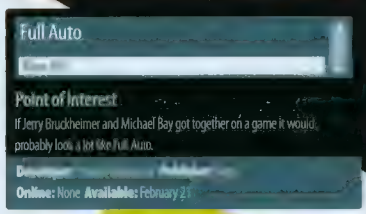
Full Auto

Now that the dust (debris…shrapnel) has settled on the big launch—which in hindsight I still can't wrap my brain around Microsoft's tactics—it's time to begin plumbing the depths of the 360's capabilities as more bona fide games begin to trickle in. I managed to play six Q1 offerings this past December, all of which awed me on some level, but none so much as Saint's Row and Full Auto. This is one seriously extreme case of road rage.

There is much to master as Full Auto gets underway, running through the extensive tutorial missions. The game's patented hook "Unwrecking"—a Prince of Persia-style rewind technique—couldn't be more at home (real-time do-overs can make your whole day); there are single-, double-, and rear-mounted weapons to master, rivals to kill, meters to fill by powersliding, jumping, and wrecking (demolishing anything within the immediate thoroughfare that won't slow you down too much) and, of course, racing, which in Full Auto is about a lot more than steering around a track.

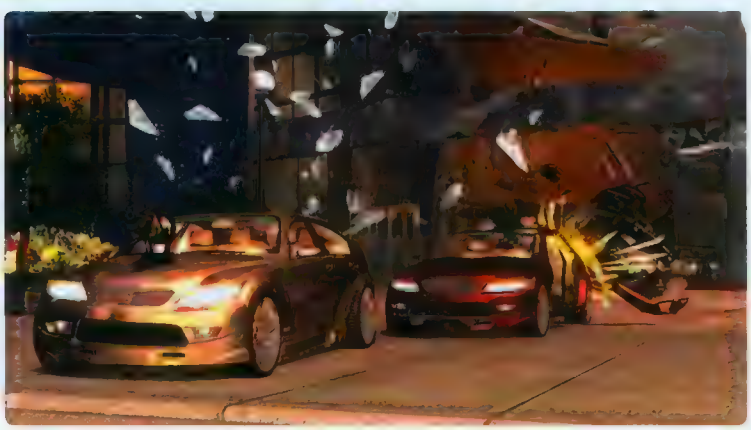
"This is one seriously extreme case of road rage."




Full Auto
Point of Interest
If Jerry Bruckheimer and Michael Bay got together on a game it would probably look a lot like Full Auto.
Online: None Available: February 21

These core elements are what define the Full Auto experience. There's no story—no people or personalities, no shops, and no cut scenes. This is a mission-based arcade style racer all the way: Choose your car, pick your weapons, check your objectives and hit the streets. You want modes? We got modes: Should you survive the C, B and A class rounds you can take your earned cars (if you consider something called Hookzilla a car) and colors and head for Speed Kills, Hunter, Time Trials, Ambush, Dominator, Rampages, Overtake, Sudden Death, Warlord, Gang Wars, Pink Slips, Enduro, and, finally, Impossible rounds. So, lots to do, and especially see. Visually the game is nothing short of brilliant, with a major focus on body deformation, explosions of every shape and kind, wall-to-wall effects, and insane detail (with the exception of the cars' interiors). For these purposes, Pseudo have built in a real-time instant-replay feature (which is why I know what the interiors look like) that lets you rewind your craziest moments and then play them back with pause, slo-mo, zoom, and freeze. I had more fun with this than I believe is legal in most states.

At this point polish is still needed—there are no segues from mode to mode as you clear areas, and a few hitches in the frame rate—but these will surely be repaired in due time. Otherwise, I'm sufficiently blown away. Dave Halverson



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X3

Moving off the overhead action-RPG foundation that housed the last X-Men game, the combat-intensive X3's being crafted around heavy environmental interaction and a trio of characters who strike out on their own separate adventures. The game focuses on Wolverine, Nightcrawler and Iceman, whose missions set in motion several events that build an extensive backstory to the upcoming movie. *X-Men 3*'s screenwriter Zak Penn was tapped to write the story for X3, dedicated to explain such details as why Nightcrawler is absent from the third film. While a heavy action experience is the thrust of this latest virtual take on the X-Men universe, developer Z-Axis are venturing to give fans a meaty narrative true to the spirit of the characters.

Team assistance is a hallmark of the X-Men universe, leading the design of the game away from character switching and more toward team assistance. Throughout the adventure, several recognizable allies will join the cause, along with new faces tied to the game's original story. The game is being made for ease of play, but dialing in the finer mechanics rewards you with points that can be used for upgrades on powers and attacks, which is called the mutant evolution system.

"Team assistance is a hallmark of the X-Men universe..."

Diversity of play is also on the plate for X3. Each of the three playable heroes possesses differing styles of aggression and technique. Nightcrawler relies on stealth and agility, using his acrobatic makeup to dart across the level, swinging on pipes, scaling walls and avoiding hot-spots with his teleportation powers. Wolverine is obviously the more aggressive type, using his strength to take lots of damage and deal out heavy combos for some brutal damage of his own—including the levels, which are highly destructible

Iceman is perhaps the most unique character in that he can traverse the entire level using his ice slide, zigzagging pretty much anywhere he pleases. This mechanic will also be used for structured sections, like boss battles and chase scenes.

In an effort to stay as true to the framework of *X-Men 3* as possible, the developers decided to use 2D animated cut scenes that closely follow the style of the film, as well as employ a bevy of other neat little touches. If you've been pining for a new angle on the X-Men game universe, here it is. Brody Fiechter

Point of interest

Zak Penn, writer for the *X-Men 3* film, penned the script for the game.

Developer: Z-Axis **Publisher:** Activision
Online: None **Available:** May

X3

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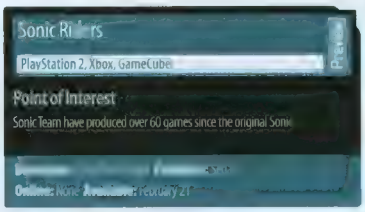
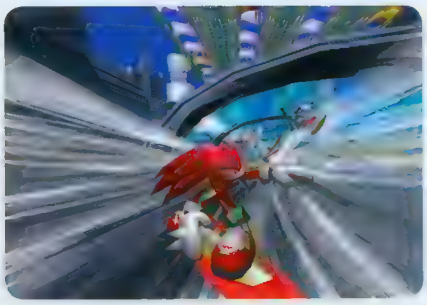
Sonic Riders

Riders on the storm

Sonic Team are known for many things, such as creating fascinating original characters based on everything from hedgehogs to chickens; producing some of the catchiest, happiest music on earth, and coming up with groundbreaking new game ideas like NiGHTS, Burning Rangers, Billy Hatcher, and of course Sonic the Hedgehog—the most groundbreaking game of the pivotal 16-bit era. One thing they are especially *not* known for, however, is buttoning up their games. Since Sonic Adventure blazed its 3D trail on Dreamcast, most of what Sonic Team releases feels anywhere from 80-90% complete. They seem perfectly fine with palpable glitches right out in the open, which is where Sonic Riders currently resides. If you remember Trickstyle for Dreamcast, you've been barreling down this road before; otherwise imagine a complete cast of Sonic-style critters (character designs are off-the-charts cool) hover boarding around Wipeout-inspired tracks adorned with currents—or "turbulence"—and TM Sonic Team bells and whistles. Sounds great… Is great… If they finish it.

Currently the level of control you have over your board is limited, as you more or less wrestle to keep it on the track rather than attend to skillfully picking lines, grabbing big air, and hitting the sweet spots, all of which are key components in zipping around each gorgeous franchise-indigenous sprawl. You can see where you need to be, but the control just isn't there. And then there's that aforementioned Sonic Team glitching. I popped my character through more solid matter than I care to mention, often times losing sight of it all together. Now, normally I'd dismiss this as indicative of an early build, but I know Sonic Team; when they hit their deadline they'll tack on "The End" and ship it to retail. So here's hoping they take the time to tune this one right because not only is this a great concept ripe for ancillary sequels (beats kart racing, that's for sure), but quite frankly, they owe us after Shadow. Of course if they really want redemption, Sega could always give us a new Chaotix or Astal for PSP. D. Halverson


Sonic Ri rs
PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Point of Interest
Sonic Team have produced over 60 games since the original Sonic



"...Sonic-style critters hover boarding around Wipe-out-inspired tracks."

The Sonic cast seem tailor made for this type of racing. Could this be Sega's F-Zero?

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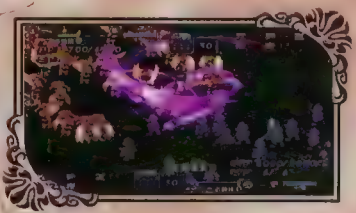

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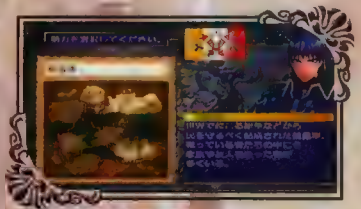

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Grandia III

Grandia spectacle

"...even the most frenzied, enemy-laden fights won't be impossible to manage."

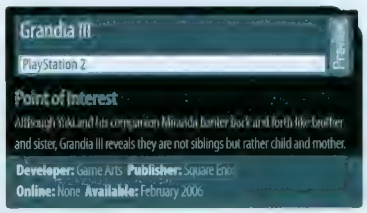
If nothing else, Grandia III is the RPG with a heart. After defeating the villainous Kornell and seeing him fall unceremoniously into a pit trap, the childlike Alfina notes that it gets cold out in the woods at night. With that, she reaches into her pack and procures a delightful pink blanket for Kornell to drape over himself.

This aw-shucks moment is brought courtesy of Game Arts and Square Enix, neither of whom has ever been hesitant to lay off the shmaltz. But if Grandia III can be faulted for its cutesiness and strict adherence to RPG doctrine, then it also has to be praised for its straightforward, workmanlike quality; the thing is, without pretense, well-made, challenging and, even in its previewable state, fun to play.

The game stars would-be pilot Yuki and his disapproving mother, Miranda. After a failed flight attempt, mother and son rescue the wayward lass Alfina, and agree to escort her back to her homeland where she can, oddly enough, fulfill her destiny as a sort of chosen one who can speak to the gods. Enter a roguish salt in Alonso, a parallel universe, a persistent foe, path-based exploration, and Grandia's RPG elements are all fully set in place.

This year's model features a redesigned combat system where icons representing the heroes and their foes revolve around a wheel. When the icon reaches a certain spot on the wheel, an action can be entered, and the game pauses from its (almost) real-time combat. When enemies are gearing up for special attacks, countermoves can be employed to thwart them; these special canceling attacks allow the heroes to offset any inherent advantages bigger and tougher foes may have. Further, two allies can combine their offense, with one knocking a target into the air and the other performing multiple juggle attacks. Combat here dramatically eschews the notion of combatants fighting in neat rows, moving up to strike and back to defend. Instead, there's a wonderful sort of chaotic racing to and fro across the various battlefields as the fighters seek their targets and are themselves targeted.

An excellent strategy advice system gives hints as to an enemy's maneuvers in combat, ensuring even the most frenzied, enemy-laden fights won't be impossible to manage. It's initially an invaluable tool considering the disorderly nature of III's combat, but it's certainly more fun to turn the option off and use the on-screen cues to gauge a foe's strategy. Without the hints, the battles are more immediate, and certainly more fun to wade through. Greg Orlando


Grandia III
PlayStation 2
Point of Interest
Although Yuki and his companion Miranda banter back and forth like brother and sister, Grandia III reveals they are not siblings but rather child and mother.
Developer: Game Arts Publisher: Square Enix
Online: None Available: February 2006

Below: So much exquisite character design in one frame. This is Game Arts at their very best.

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Wild Arms Alter Code F

'Tis a puzzle, young lad. Yonder crank will surely point the way.

The first dungeon in Wild Arms Alter Code F is abysmal. In fact, the first 20 minutes or so it takes to get through Rudy's prologue is packed with every element that drove me away from turn-based RPGs before the tide recently (finally) turned, such as battles that occur literally every few seconds/inches this pan in for a good 5 seconds before they set (you still have a limited cancel, but this is a tedious endeavor given they could have simply spread them apart), rudimentary models with painted-on visages that make the characters look like Mr. Bill, and no camera control outside of manually spinning the background with the shoulder buttons...inverted with no option to switch no less. On PS this was (sort of) okay, but isn't the idea behind a remake to bring things up to current standards?

If you ask me, Alter Code F takes a giant step in the wrong direction. The cast is now presented in proper human form (although I prefer the SD manga characters), but the models look first-gen PS2 all the way—far removed from what we've become accustomed to with games like Magna Carta, FFX-2, DDS, and so on. And because it resembles a lackluster PS2 game more than a special or enhanced edition, much of the smoky Wild West-meets-anime flavor is lost. The clever interactive dungeon and scenario designs shine through (this was a great PS RPG), but the combination of the dated 3D and quite possibly worst looking (and playing) overworld ever—man is this thing an eyesore—do more to taint than tantalize.

In the instance you haven't played a Wild Arms RPG, I'd recommend digging out the old PS or picking up a PSOne and the original; however, if you insist, there's some light at the end of the tunnel. The battle system especially comes to mind due to its highly immersive teamwork component, using special skills for coordinated attacks. Where rather than stand in place and wait for your signals, the characters scurry for position and then carry out specific commands in a tactical manner. Skill activation, combo attacks and magic all deftly come into play on both the offensive and defensive sides of the scale, and although somewhat crudely modeled, the creatures are bursting with classic Japanese monster zeal. Expect rows of saliva-dripping, razor-sharp teeth, massive armored hybrids, and some cleverly constructed mecha on which to chip away. The story is also excellent, in line with the ability to switch between characters on the fly to utilize their specific talents, and you can thank me later for putting ADV and Agetec together to pack in episode 1 of the anime, *Twilight Venom*. Considering the free anime, Alter Code F is pretty much a requisite purchase for series die-hards, otherwise you'd be better off (providing you've consumed DQ VIII) with Magna Carta, DDS 2 or the upcoming Tales of Legendia, Grandia III and MS Saga. No shortage of RPGs here!

"...I'd recommend digging out the old PS..."

Wild Arms Alter Code F — 6.5

PlayStation 2

Still a great story and overall design. Western RPGs don't exactly grow on trees, partner.

Dreadful overworld, dated technology and control, overly realistic characters.

Developer: Media Vision Publisher: Ag
Online: None Available: November

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2005 YEAR IN REVIEW

CONTENTS

2005 was a year like no other in the game industry. And while that statement might apply any year in this most creative of industries, never so much as '05. Never before have so many great games gone unnoticed and never before have we seen so much quality over a 12-month cycle. Not only was console on fire, but with the DS and PSP duking it out for mobile supremacy, handhelds made their way into the spotlight with a new vengeance. Before it was all over we saw a leap in controller technology from Nintendo that could change the way we play games forever; Sony's mind-melting cell processor in action; and Microsoft fired the first wobbly shot in the next, next-generation console wars.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

DAVE HALVERSON EDITOR IN CHIEF

Through the 8-bit renaissance (courtesy of Nintendo, whom we owe all of this to) to the golden age of 16-bit with its parallax scrolling and later Mode-7 and the FX Chip—our first forays into 3D gaming, again courtesy of Nintendo—scaling and rotation, and finally texture-mapped 3D polygons (after the Nintendo 64's Trilinear MIPmapped interpolation proved less than Earth-shattering), I've seen my share of milestones. And while each provided some unforgettable moments in gaming, none so much as the revelations 2005 has brought.

...January 11: RE4, January 25: Oddworld Stranger's Wrath, March 22: God of War, April 19: Psychonauts... Coming out of Q1 I'd experienced 4 genre-busting hardware-defying works of perfection before I even began thinking about E3 and what the PS3, Xbox 360 or Revolution might bring, after which (as blown away as I was and still am by Sony's display of power and the few genuine 360 games I've been ogling) the current-gen nonchalantly dusted itself off and continued to pummel my every waking moment. Beyond this list of my 10 favorite games of 2005 lie Darkwatch, Phantom Dust, Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge, Castlevania: Curse of Darkness, Call of Duty 2, Need For Speed: Most Wanted (360), Sly 3: Band of Thieves, Peter Jackson's King Kong (360), Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones, and on and on...and on. Not to mention (although here goes) mobile games like Sonic Rush, Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow, Tokobot, Gunstar Super Heroes, Death, Jr. PoPoLoCrois, and MediEvil. Now that I've inadvertently made this a top 26, it bears mentioning that many of these games underperformed at retail. Any year a company like Oddworld has to close its doors because of a marketing decision (debacle, whatever) you know that trouble is afoot.

"Coming out of Q1 I'd experienced 4 genre-busting hardware-defying works of perfection before I even began thinking about E3"

Fact is, more great games fell through the cracks this year than ever before. US Retail just isn't geared to pushing games by quality or genre and shelf space and life is limited. Gaming takes in more than Hollywood but DVD movies still own the aisles. When it comes to games sales the big buyers like the big brands, like GTA and Madden. They couldn't care less that Psychonauts is a critical superhero. It's not "known" and so it's not worthy. The mega-stores that cover our land like massive warts on the nation's buttockle region, measure success by profit-per-square-foot so quality means dick outside of your dedicated shops...shops they live to consume in their gluttonous wake. As big as gaming is, its infrastructure runs like an old jalopy skewed towards the fat cats who feed their lulled masses what makes them the most money, creating an imbalance that continues to stifle gaming's elite. This is no rant either. We entertained a potential program this year with one of the bigs (in an effort to turn the tide) and ended up running for our lives when they insisted we only do covers on games they were ordering big on, and cease doing features on games like Magna Carta, Psychonauts and on down the line. The danger is real and the adversary clad in Dockers, with a BA in his back pocket and a focus group that will tell him whatever he wants for 50 bucks and a pepperoni pizza. So here's to the death of the super-store video game corral, the further evolution of virtual transactions, and another year of gameplay strides as giant as the technological ones.

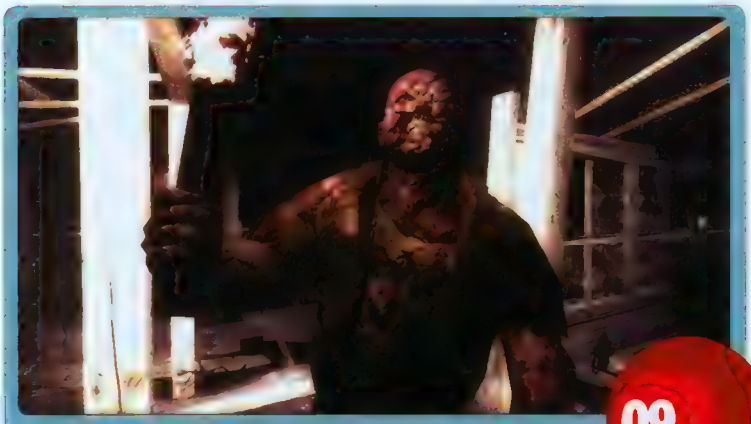
PERSONAL TOP 10

Legend of Kay

Capcom PS2

Go ahead, laugh it up—then go buy the game and you can thank me later. The Legend of Kay offers up some of the freshest melee and aerial play mechanics to come down the platforming pike in some time along with a fully fleshed out (albeit critter-based) universe bursting with indigenous lore and a hierarchy (ripe for the toppling) all its own. This is a beautiful, altogether inspired game accompanied by one of the year's very best soundtracks, featuring the coolest kitty since Tai-Fu and a cast of creatures that make each stop along the way itchy scratchy fun (until they speak at least). Push through the overly fruity first hour and enjoy a skills-based platformer as long in the tooth as it is taxing on the reflexes.

DAVE HALVERSON EDITOR IN CHIEF



09

Condemned

Sega *Xbox 360*

Sega made a lot of savvy moves in 2005 and they'll surely make many more in the years ahead as they continue their mission of returning the company to its former glory. Condemned dared to drag the FPS genre kicking and screaming out of its haggard old mold and into a dark new residence beyond evil, dabbling in a more plausible urban nightmare incorporating forensic science with a soiree of serial killers and one cop-on-the-run guided by a guardian angel and armed only with what he's able to appropriate from his surroundings or the virulent horde that stands between him and his puppet master.

08

Conker Live and Reloaded

Microsoft *Xbox*

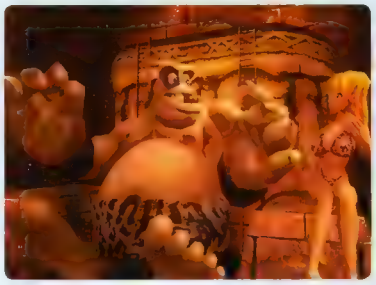
The polar opposite to all of the above (and below) Conker has a special place in my heart due to its unusual origins—after it was dubbed cutest game in the galaxy, Rare pulled an "oh yeah? How about this?" and turned it into a vile poop fest/parody—and Rare-ified gameplay, the combination of which has never (and likely will never) see the light of day again. How it traversed such a twisted path, beginning life as a before-its-time M-rated Nintendo game, only to culminate 5 years later as a special edition Xbox game that happens to look better than 90% of the Xbox 360 launch titles, is borderline miraculous for a drunken squirrel. Never underestimate the power of opera-singing poop, nut-on-bolt action, intoxicated rodents, and urination as a play mechanic.

07

Resident Evil 4

Capcom *GameCube*

This may come as a shock but I'm not "into" Resident Evil. Aside from every RE lover's bane (Dead Aim) the series has never gelled with me…until now, seeing as how they did away with preset running amidst pre-rendered BGs, doorway after black doorway, and stowing precious items in opportunely placed foot lockers. RE4 genuinely scared me, as much as it did astonish me with its seemingly otherworldly visuals and art direction, and the uncanny feeling that I was in actual harm's way—simply extraordinary. Who knew the GameCube was like a tiny Xbox and then some? What a shame that the 3rd parties balked on this amazing console…although it may have been a blessing in disguise when you think about it…



Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

Square Enix *PS2*

Dragon Quest VIII further drew me back into the traditional role-playing genus that I had not long before left for dead. Simply put, Level 5 is the new Square and DQ VIII the quintessential realization of the traditional RPG. This is the original formula honed to absolute perfection. Now that I'm back on board thanks to Magna Carta, Grandia III, Tales of Legendia, and DQ of course, I hope this amazing RPG roll we're on continues, and judging by what's on the horizon it doesn't seem like I need to wish all that hard.

06

05

Shadow of the Colossus

Sony *PS2*

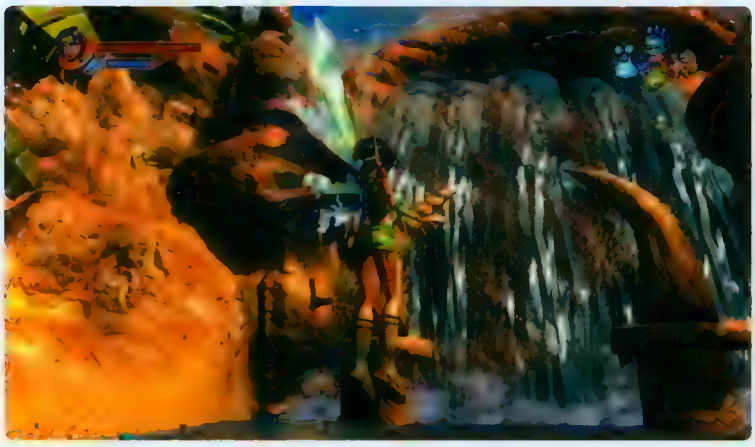
When I began playing Shadow of the Colossus—a game I purposely didn't touch (save for maybe 5 minutes on our pre-beta preview copy) until I had a retail copy—I instantly had it pegged as my game of the year. This would be the game that would topple the mighty God of War. Hours later when I realized how straightforward an adventure it was in terms of gameplay however (along with some peculiar control issues associated with the Colossi), I became more wrapped up in the plight, spectacle, and feeling I got riding Agro; an emotional connection I've seldom if ever felt before. While that alone doesn't warrant my top spot, the experience overall will stay with me forever, just as the ending will eternally haunt me... unless Ico 2 (if there is one) provides some much needed answers.

DAVE HALVERSON EDITOR IN CHIEF

04

Kameo: Elements of Power

Microsoft *Xbox 360*



When a Rare-developed action epic with a female lead ends up number 4 on my list you know it's been a banner year. While most people agree Kameo is a beautiful game, it didn't impact most the way it did me as this style of game has gone out of vogue since Rare's purchase and subsequent awkward transition to the Microsoft brood. Had it released on Nintendo hardware it would have been a guaranteed million-seller but swimming in a pool where Halo is the big fish and realism clearly king, Kameo and company were lucky to see the light of day at all. Here's to games like this growing up (see my number one and two picks) so that a new generation can enjoy this amazing level of gameplay and immersion.

PET PEEVE OF THE YEAR

Since when is a 10-15-hour-long action or adventure game considered short? A few years ago I was paying 200 bucks for 40-minute long Neo Geo games. Do people realize that a 30-40-hour game would either have to recycle areas (a.k.a. GTA), run an absurd budget with no hopes of turning a profit and/or take 4-6 years to complete?

HONORABLE MENTION

[redacted]

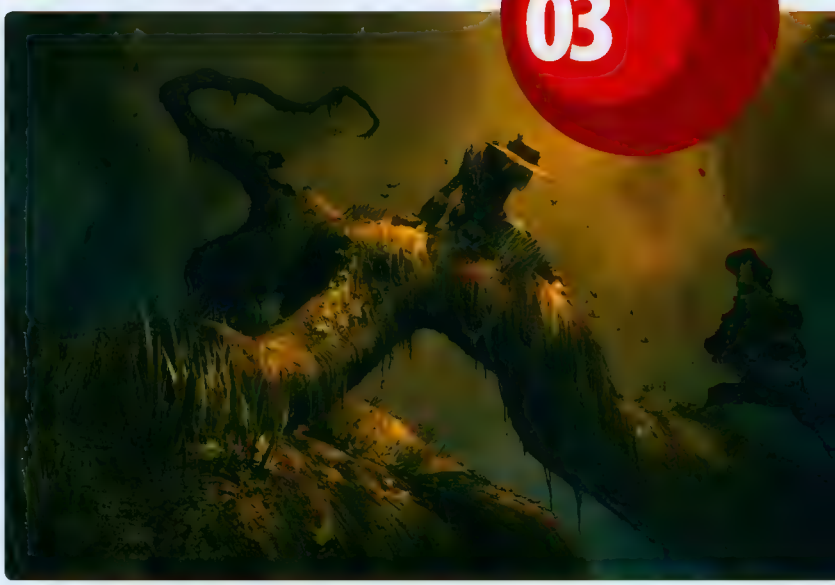
Nintendo *GC*

Honorable mentions are no more than an excuse to cram in one more game, but you'll have to indulge me because, for someone who hates war games, I absolutely love Battalion Wars. If you're in possession of a GameCube and for some reason passed, do yourself a huge favor and liberate a copy today. I pray Kuju does a Revolution sequel.

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

EA *Xbox*

03



We were playing Stranger's Wrath during last year's voting and wished we could have cheated a bit and given it game of the year 2004. The fact that it appears throughout this year's feature is a testament to the lasting impression it left on us all. Where many faulted the game for its jarring twist, which changed the emphasis of the game in the blink of an eye, we applaud it even louder today: How refreshing it was to take the commerce component that we're all so accustomed to and just yank it out from under us. Don't bother earning money for that surgery…you're now a lonely hunted freak on a completely different path. Redemption and heroism hasn't had a finer day since. It remains to this day the single best story arch I've ever encountered complimenting the best first-person action and adventure that exists today. The fact that Oddworld's reluctance to dumb it down for PS2 spelled their end—after surviving Microsoft kicking it to the curb for reasons I will never understand—is as tragic as the plight they so lovingly crafted.

Psychonauts

Majesco *Xbox*

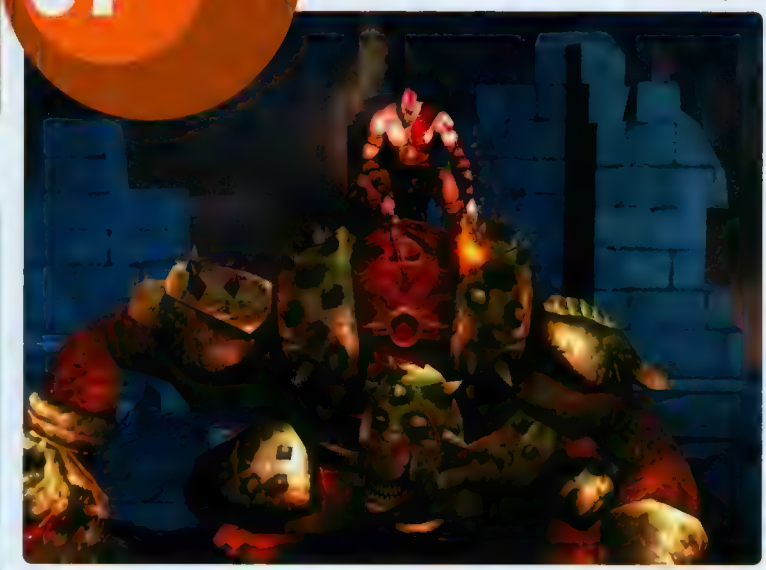
I knew Psychonauts would be a classic from the moment I set eyes on it at E3 2002 but when Ford Cruller offered up a slice of bacon as a communication device I knew I wasn't in Kansas anymore. Tim Schafer and company took me on a ride that I'll never forget by fusing patently unique devices with platforming glory, unforgettable characters, and a visual style that will go unmatched until he hatches his next diabolical scheme. The music, story and acting in Psychonauts propelled it to a place no platformer has ever aspired, where it will reside until a worthy successor arrives. The waiting room in Beetlejuice comes to mind.

02

01

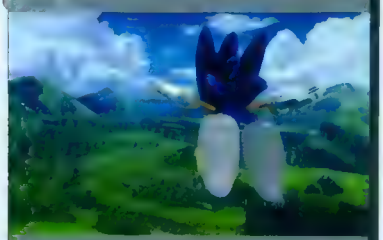
God of War

Sony *PS2*



Admittedly, dispensing 3 giant, hardware-defying Hydras was a grand way to begin an adventure but finishing off the first act by bedding down a pair of fair maidens before embarking on the most bone-crunchingly cinematic adventure of all time sealed the deal for me before the first minotaur was pinned and skewered: God of War isn't just my game of the year -- it's the single best action game ever created in my book. Essentially a grand platforming epic in a blood- and sweat-soaked M-rated shell, not only did it offer a level of detail and art seldom seen, but it innovated in the process, honing every tried and true device to perfection via the finest melee combat and weaponry imaginable and a timing component that made boss battles as fresh as a the last corpse Kratos left in his turbulent wake.

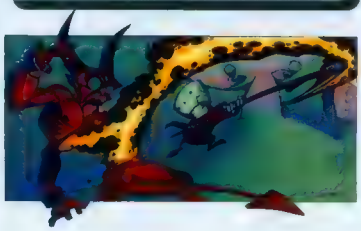
MOST WANTED 2006



New Sonic the Hedgehog (360), Gears of War (360), Time Shift (360) [eM]-eNCHANTarM (360) Dead Rising (360), The Darkness (360), Moto GP 2006 (360) Saints Row (360), Okami (PS2) Starcaft: Ghost (Xbox) Tomb Raider Legend (360) Final Fantasy FF XII (PS2), The Legend of Zelda (GC or ??), Killzone (PS3), Warhawk (PS3), MotorStorm (PS3), Heavenly Sword, (PS3), Gundam World (PS3), .hack// GU (PS2), Too Human (360) MGS4 (PS3) and I better stop.

WISH LIST

Next-gen versions of NiGHTS, Kid Icarus, Strider (you can do 3D now too, I'm totally cool with it), Battletoads, Castlevania (with a female lead), F-Zero, and Shinobi (the real one from "Revenge of," not some poser); more anime-based games but please no more fighters, PN 03 for PSP (it's an easy port and fits the format perfectly), a next-generation Street Fighter Action RPG (there's your GTA Capcom, trust me), someone needs to save The Red Star and I hope Death Jr.'s next bid is on console because, well, I dig the little guy to no end. Not so much to ask for.



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

BRADY FIECHTER EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Forget the chore of living in the real world. Escape was at its hypnotic best in the wonderful world of games in 2005—a year that crushed 2004 and its anemic retreads. Despite all the licensed and sequel games stealing the thunder of original creativity, this year was not without a pleasing supply of admirably new works. Lower profile games like Condemned, Psychonauts, Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath and Lumines joined a number of other fantastic achievements, each offering something uniquely special in its own right.

As much as there was to rail against in 2005—crap story telling, assembly line design, the decline of fantasy—games like these are why I found the year so memorable, and the safer, higher-profile sequels that surrounded them showed some classic series at their peak: Resident Evil 4 and its creepy brilliance; Call of Duty 2 and its spectacular craft and intensity; Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow and its classically gorgeous 2D. But beyond the more substantial, critically acclaimed offerings, this was a year to like for the tiny surprises, like Mario Strikers, which recalls the lightning-fast simplicity of the oldschool 16-bit hockey games.

And speaking of tiny, portable gaming actually grabbed my interest for the first time. Before fizzling out from limp software support, the PSP at least blew my mind with its striking form and beguiling function, serving me hours of fun with Lumines, Ridge Racer and Wipeout. It's the DS that deserves the real credit, hushing naysayers like myself with one great game after another, from traditional kicks like Mario Kart DS and Mario and Luigi: Partners in Time to esoteric gems like Elektroplankton and Meteos. Handhelds were more than on-the-road distractions, becoming a serious part of my gaming life for 2005.

Of course, the launch of the Xbox 360 was effectively the big story in 2005, and for all its blunders, the system makes me very happy—at least for now. Hi-def is awesome. Improved sound does matter. The Xbox Live Arcade, multimedia functions and other innovative tidbits are increasingly proving to attract my attention. Never mind that it breaks the bank to utilize all this power, and never mind that the games are overpriced and mostly shined-up ports. Well, ok, maybe do mind all that, but my launch blinders are fully on, and I'm loving every second of the new Xbox 360 experience. Until 2006 and Sony and Nintendo's race to turn the 360 into a Dreamcast drops into full throttle, bid farewell to 2005. Here were my favorite games:

"Escape was at its hypnotic best in the wonderful world of games in 2005—a year that crushed 2004 and its anemic retreads."

PERSONAL TOP 10

Mario Kart DS

Nintendo *NDS*

My apologies to the likes of Condemned, King Kong, Half-Life 2 and Psychonauts for putting Mario Kart DS in the 10 spot. Yes, I love this game for huge nostalgic purposes. Yes, I love this game because it holds several tracks from every Mario Kart. And the more time I spend with the game, the more I love the cheap losses at the finish line, the outrageously fun balloon matches, the wi-fi races that bring in the invaluable human component. And the more I see just how cleverly designed it all is. What some people find annoying is simply part of the Mario Kart brilliance.

Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow

Konami *NDS*

09

If I had to name my favorite series, Castlevania would battle it out with Metroid and Zelda, so it comes as no surprise that a 2D version of the game, cured in the mold of Symphony of the Night, would continue to grab me. Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow isn't original in design or presentation, but that's just fine when that design and presentation is so far superior to most everything out there. From the animation and the character design to the Gothic setting and the music that completes its atmosphere, the game is classic Castlevania at its best. And while the gamemakers did a good job of altering the gameplay slightly, there exists that classic combination of exploration, role-playing and item management. I'll play these games again and again.

Mario Superstar Baseball

Nintendo *GC*

08

Mario Baseball became my NBA Street of the fantasy sports games, drawing more hours of my life than any game this year. The strategic element of the game falters at times, but the crazy energy of the 2-player competitions is such a blast, I just didn't care that a cheap run or two may alter the entire complexion of a matchup. That's part of the point, too, dealing with the chaos that reigns on the field and finding yourself caught in the dumbest of mistakes. I miss the simplicity of old sports games, and Mario Baseball was a throwback to those days. Full of personality, charm and clever subtlety—typical Nintendo, of course—Mario Baseball will be played for years to come.

07

Killer 7

Killer 7 took me a while to warm up to, but there came a point where the phantasmagoric imagery put me in a trance. Even when this strange, hallucinatory adventure crossed the line between wild invention and self-indulgence, I was simply grateful to be in a game that was taking such unusual risks. The story of divergent personalities and global conspiracies mishmashed its way to a bizarre climax that left me wanting less stream of consciousness and more direct meaning, but the visual storytelling made up for the failings. As basic and straightforward as the action and puzzle solving were, their integration into the space of the world turned the mechanical into the sublime. Killer 7 was the most unusual game of the year for sure, a bizarre and fascinating journey.

06

Call of Duty 2

Activision *Xbox 360*

I've killed so many Germans, taken out so many Panzers and crawled through so many bombed-out trenches in my gaming lifetime that I thought the World War II battle was ready for the white flag. There's nothing in Call of Duty 2 I haven't seen before, but there's never been a first-person shooter, World War-themed or not, that's taken that familiarity and added so much adrenaline. There is a tremendous skill of design behind Call of Duty 2, and the full-on Xbox 360 treatment only frees that design for incredible new possibilities. Brutal and thrilling, Call of Duty 2 was easily my favorite 360 launch game.

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

Square Enix *PS2*

Dragon Quest VIII recalled the delights of the Chrono Trigger and Final Fantasy VI days, back when role-playing games were dominated by sweeping fantasy and a fairy-tale innocence. It couldn't be more faithful to those good old days, lovingly maintaining the staples of a classically spun adventure. In the hands of lesser talents, a game like this might come off a bit too antiquated, but Level-5 did a glorious job keeping things like the turn-based battles and general experience system as involving as they've ever been. It was also good to see a return to a more sprawling quest across a complex overworld. Like the great RPGs before it, the triumph of Dragon Quest VIII was its ability to make me feel part of the land and its characters in a way no other game can. The spirit of an epic journey had never been so alive in another game this year.

05

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

EA *XB*

The best chapter in Oddworld Inhabitants' continuing book of Oddworld turned out to be the ending, but at least the talented gamemakers can go out knowing they crafted one of the few games of the year with real emotion. The boorish Stranger and his critter-extinguishing ways were never quite what they seemed, revealing a plot twist that carried metaphorical weight to go along with the shock. The game knew how to balance the quiet with the explosive, calling on serene moments of artistry to balance the run-and-gunning. And how about that live ammo, which actually created an original gameplay focus within the familiar first-person shooting. Oddworld's character designs have always stood out to me as the best in the American game community, and here they worked within their 3D limitations as well as they possibly could, creating film-like quality designs. The world and its inhabitants in Stranger's Wrath were astonishing to behold; the wildly entertaining boss encounters and inventive bounty mechanics were no less well established.

04

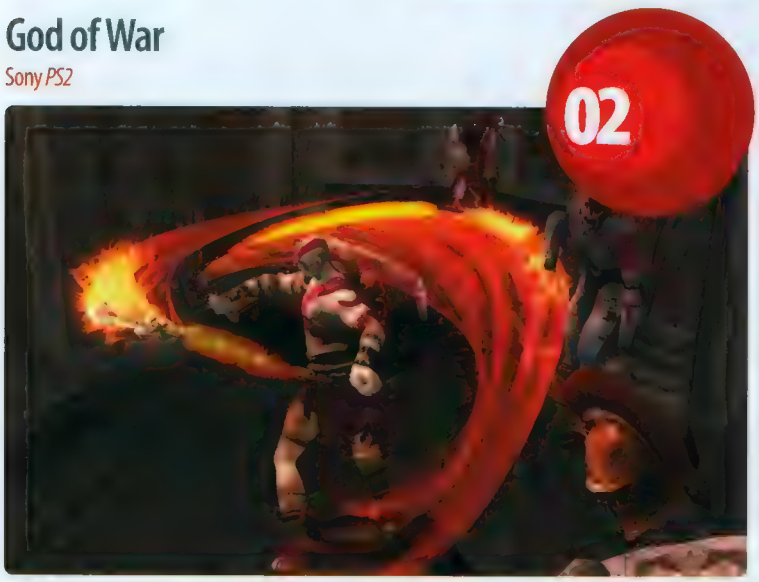
Shadow of the Colossus

Sony *PS2*

Majestic and pensive, beautiful and moving, Shadow of the Colossus was the artistic accomplishment of the year—a game that made me ponder its implications. Like ICO before it, Shadow of the Colossus told a story through images and mood, inviting me to draw very personal conclusions towards its higher meaning. The adventure qualities were immediately a draw—I love this type of game—but the heart of the experience was the colossi, which were as awesome to look at as they were to interact with. More than respectively inventive as a new gameplay device, these wondrous creatures captured my sense of wonder with their presence—the way they moved, the way they seemed to look at me with anger and confusion. Killing them meant something. I felt regret every time I plunged my sword into their vitals. Indeed, I felt many things playing Shadow of the Colossus, the most subtly expressive game of this or any year.

God of War

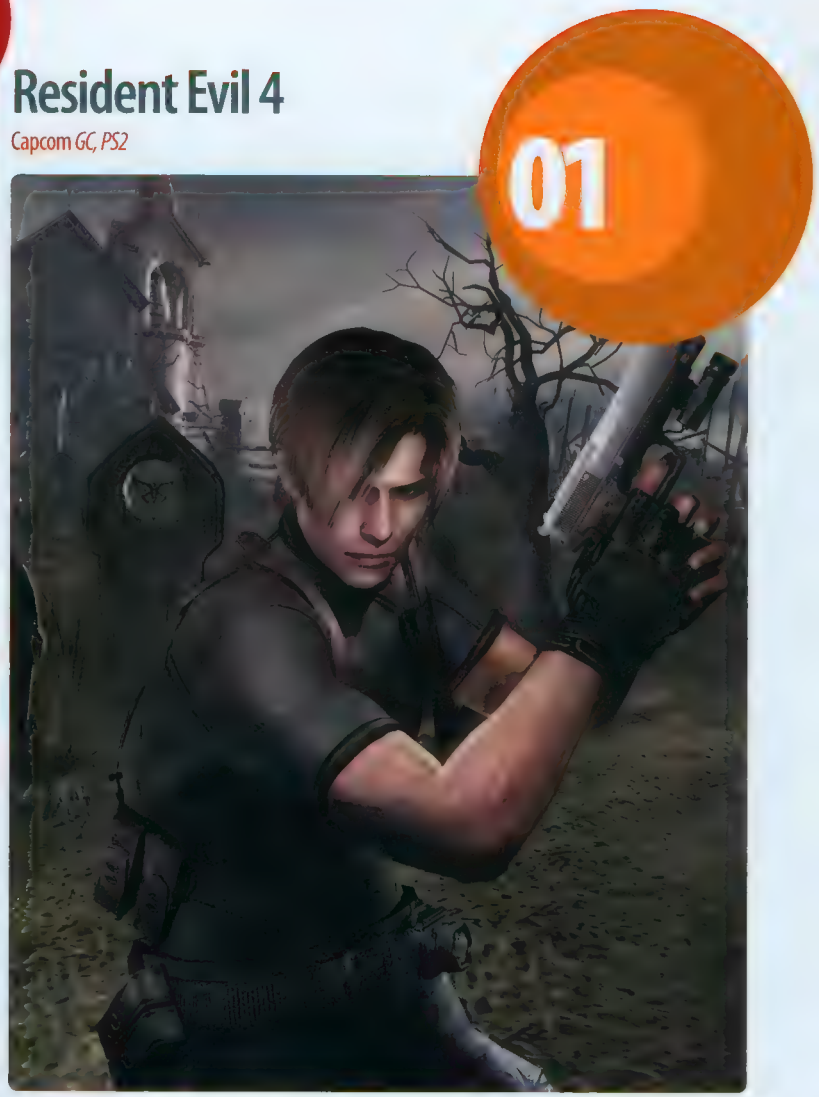
Sony *PS2*



The elegant sirens in the swirling sands of the desert. The straining, towering giant with Pandora's box strapped to its back. The striking image of Kratos slaying his wife and son. God of War delivered one great scene after another, populating its Greek setting with amazing sights and sounds. The brutal depictions of death and violence satisfied my bloodlust, but it was the tortured soul of a vulnerable hero that cut deepest. Director David Jaffe often commented on his desire for an emotional core to God of War, and it was that center that ultimately launched God of War above the best of the action-adventure games. Even some of the puzzles carried an unusual strength of conviction and immersion. Much about the game could be considered traditional in structure and design, but it was the vision and incredible attention to detail that took familiar ideas and made them so much more. The combat system was the most satisfying in a game this year, augmented by awesome animation and a graceful flow of control; that feeling of empowerment was nailed. There was just enough collecting and character growth to bring more life to the action, and when you factor in the exhilarating mini-game confrontations, the experience of combat was endlessly entertaining. God of War was obviously the result of obsessive gamemakers working on the edge of the PS2.

Resident Evil 4

Capcom *GC, PS2*



My top four games of the year each offered something entirely different and equally accomplished, and any one of them could have been named the best of this or any year. But Resident Evil 4 took the honor for a number of reasons, the most abstract being that I simply lost myself to the experience. No game thrilled me, wowed me, unnerved me or made me feel like I was playing games again for the first time like Resident Evil 4. As a fan of the series, its impact was only that much greater, and I have to give director Shinji Mikami praise for seriously rescuing the series from its downslide without relying on too many old tricks. Showing what the GameCube was capable of, the design team worked visual miracles, building set piece after set piece that created an incredible suspension of disbelief. I've never played a game that managed to feel quite so organic and convincing, stripped of the mechanical edge that cuts through even the most visually appealing games. Part of the immersion came from the designers' masterful understanding of level structure, how they set up action scenes, sequenced corridors and locomotion points, leading me around the space in a number of dynamic ways. The enemies were just as well devised, and the way they moved and reacted to my decisions was creepy. Context-sensitive gameplay has been done before, but never this good, and never with such skilled presentation and an understanding of cinematic technique. Whatever creative giant came up with the El Gigante confrontation, this is especially for you: Resident Evil 4 was the best game of 2005.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

GREG ORLANDO ASSOCIATE EDITOR

At the ass end of this year of our lord 2005, it's possible to look back fondly and proclaim that we all can, in fact, dig it, suckas. It was a remarkable year for games, but moreso for game fans, many of whom spent the last days of this very good year planning to stab other game fans in the spirit of getting an Xbox 360 for Christmas come hell or high water.

We lived, we laughed, we mourned. Like Russian boxer Vodka Drunkenski's liver, the N-Gage, Phantom, and Gizmondo suffered cirrhotic deaths, and no one was there to dance on the graves.

The PSP taught us to love pornography again. Nintendogs offered people the unique opportunity to put ridiculous glasses on a video puppy, proving these are, as Paul Simon mused, indeed days of miracle and wonder. When we thought ill of ourselves, there was always the grim realization that no matter how bad things seemed, at least we hadn't died after playing a massively multiplayer online role-playing game for 90 hours without pause. And when we thought we could choose for ourselves what was right and wrong, we had crusaders Jack Thompson, Hillary Clinton, and Arnold "The Governator" Schwarzenegger to tell us to go to bed without supper.

Eight-year-old children on Xbox Live suggested our relationship with various farm animals was not as wholesome as we had made them out to be; it was good to play together, certainly, but entirely too hard on the ears. The lack of Hitlerbots, gigantic or otherwise, coupled with the dearth of stages where game characters got to punch former German dictator Adolf Hitler in the stomach forced us to wonder where our priorities lay. None of this mattered half as much as pro skater Tony Hawk finally being able to buy Bolivia with his cut of Tony Hawk Part Eight: The Wrath of Elisa Steamer.

There was some magic to be had, too. The Movies made it possible for us, as budding auteurs, to cast a series of robots in a janitor-written sex comedy titled Jesus Punchers: The Enkillening, which some have likened to *Raging Bull*, *Chariots of Fire*, and *The Lord of the Rings* in that they are all, in fact, films. Almost. Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth, despite being an ordinary first-person adventure otherwise, proved scary enough that we needed to turn on the lights to play. Brilliant game titles such as Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath, Advance Wars DS, and Guitar Hero stretched our brains and made us better for playing them.

It wouldn't, technically, be a year without the gratuitous doling out of awards at its conclusion. So here, ado be damned, are a bunch of awards.

"...at least we hadn't died after playing a massively multiplayer online role-playing game for 90 hours without pause."

PERSONAL TOP 10

Ninja Gaiden Black

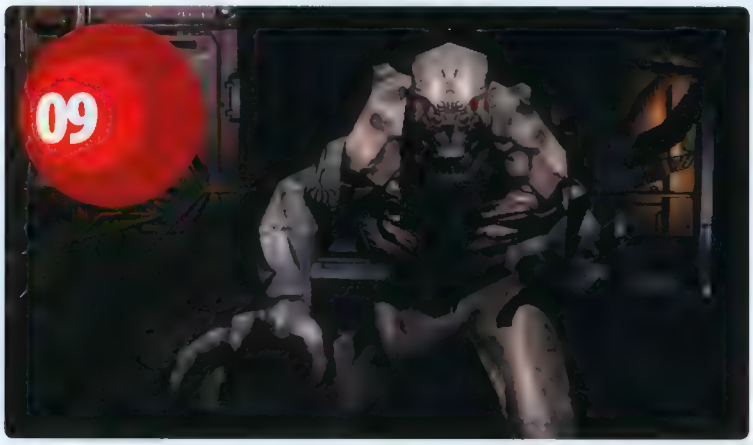
Tecmo *XB*

It is possible to teach a ninja dog new tricks. Ninja Gaiden Black stormed onto the Xbox with a brand-new camera system, a more lenient difficulty level, a bunch of new arena-themed combat competitions, and extra weapons. It made an already outstanding game (the original Ninja Gaiden for Xbox) even better, which probably defies natural law.

Doom 3

Activision *XB*

A genuinely scary vision of a post-apocalyptic hell, Doom 3 has both brains and balls. It's a frantic first-person shooter that knows when to lay off the scary monsters and provide more subtle chills in the form of darkened hallways, screams and moans, and moments of anticipation where a looming dread overshadows all. It's done to near-perfection on Xbox, and topped with a great cooperative mode.



Advance Wars DS

Nintendo *NDS*

This turn-based strategy's most potent weapon is not the bomber or the Megatank, but rather the mind of the player wielding them. Do not be fooled by this game's cartoonish characters or simple graphics; it's deep and wide and wonderfully frustrating. It's also, perhaps, the best war mankind will ever fight.

08

Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones

Ubisoft *All*

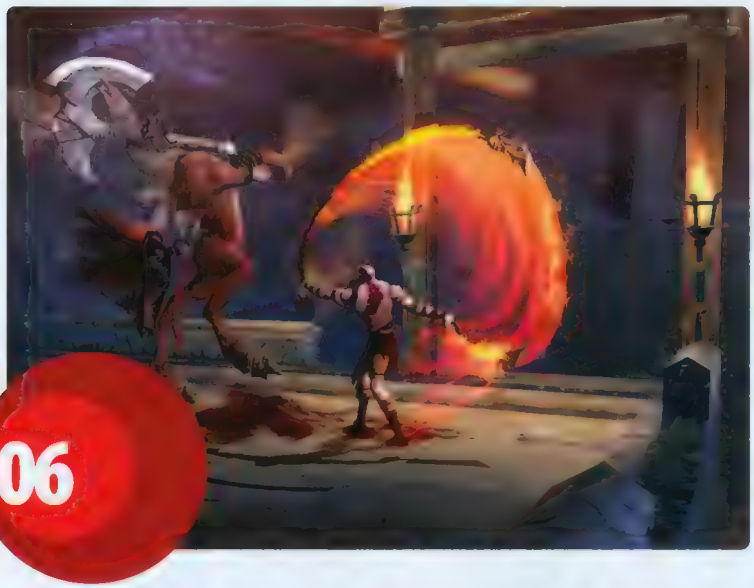
There's a touching moment where the Prince looks at his beloved city and realizes it's a shattered wreck. From there, Two Thrones dedicates itself creating a playground for the prince and his aerial derring-do. Responsive controls and gorgeous visuals combine to make this perhaps the year's best action platformer.

GREG ORLANDO ASSOCIATE EDITOR

God of War

Sony *PS2*

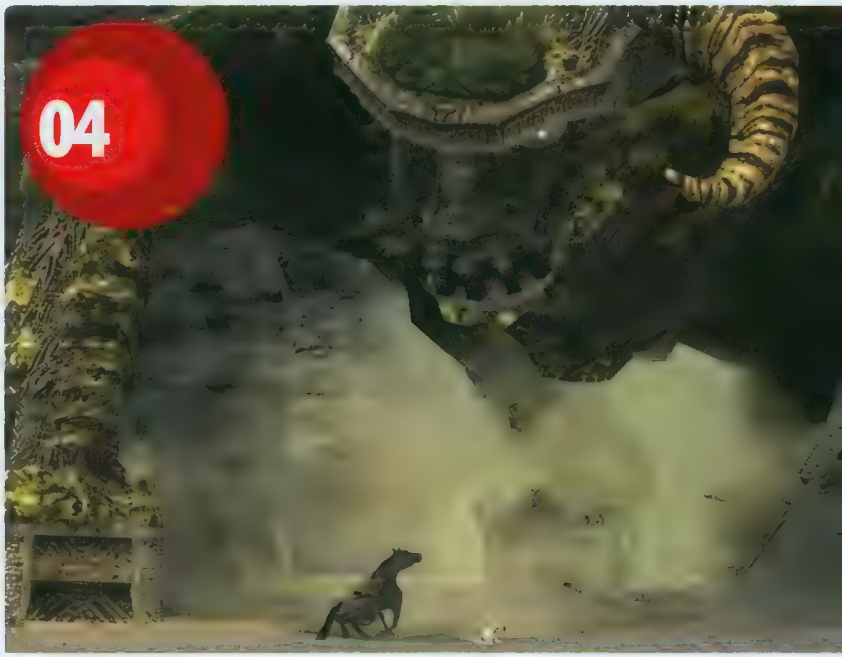
Mind-crushingly violent, God of War exults in its blood sprays, excessive gore, and dismembered body parts. Yet it's so exceedingly well done even the part where the protagonist Kratos has to restore his vitality at an orgy does not seem out of place. Its fighting system allows for seamless brutality, and even the level design imparts a sense of wonder to the proceedings.

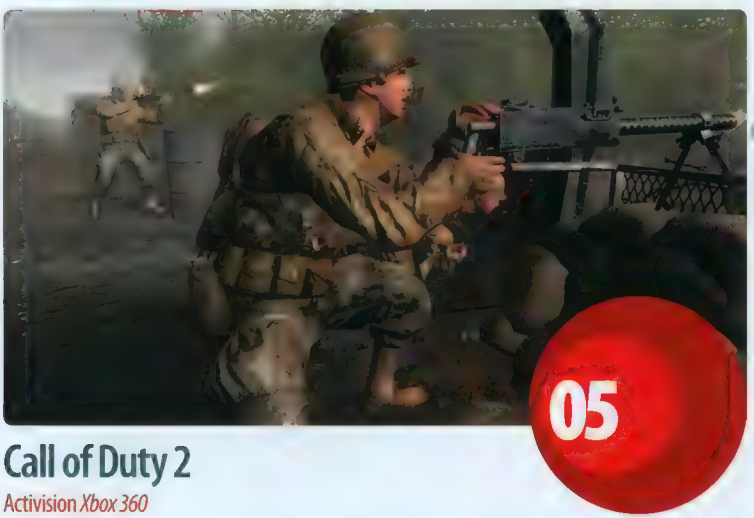


Shadow of the Colossus

Sony *PS2*

Words sometimes fail. Flawed, but ultimately brilliant, Shadow of the Colossus is perhaps the PlayStation 2's most beautiful game. It's also at once grand and majestic, with a thunderous soundtrack, and some of the most emotionally relevant gameplay ever. This game has a heart, and it beats strongly. It demands to be played.





Call of Duty 2

Activision *Xbox 360*

Three-dimensional war has never seemed so real (save for the health system, which is a concession to gameplay), so visceral, and so fluid as it does here. The sounds of battle are cacophonous, and the Germans are everywhere, dug into buildings, sliding around corners to make flanking maneuvers, rolling in waves trying to retake lost objectives. These battles seem true to life; more to the point, they seem dangerous.

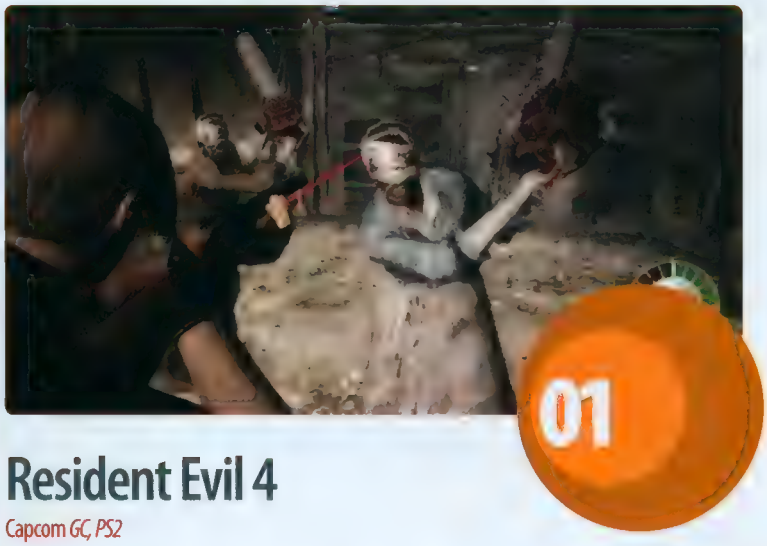
HONORABLE MENTIONS

1) Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, Capcom, Nintendo DS—It's the yappiest game you'll ever love.
2) Psychonauts, Majesco, Multiplatform, Smart and cute, Psychonauts brings the funny, and has a great hero in the psychic circus boy, Razputin.
3) Guitar Hero, Red Octane, PlayStation 2—For those about to rock with a plastic guitar, we salute you.
4) The Warriors, Rockstar, Multiplatform—The best beat-'em-up to come down the pike in a long, long time.
5) Fable: The Lost Chapters, Microsoft, Multiplatform—It's the greatest story ever retold: the story of you.

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

EA *XB*

A simple Western-themed first- and third-person adventure starring a surly bounty hunter turns into something remarkable once the titular Stranger's secret is revealed. It's equal parts beautiful and haunting, a game with both a wonderful sense of humor and humanity. This is the thinking man's shooter, and it is, like its now-defunct developer Oddworld Studios, a truly rare breed indeed.



Resident Evil 4

Capcom *GC, PS2*

An excellent reworking of the Resident Evil franchise, 4 offers a variety of frights: maniacs wielding chainsaws, homicidal midgets, and parasite-laden behemoths. It does not win the award for game of year based on its villains, but rather on the strength of its gameplay, which is as close to flawless as it gets. The view and control scheme has been changed to allow its hero Leon Kennedy to actually maneuver through these horrific environments, allowing players to fight monsters and not the urge to hurl joysticks, Now, it's just Kennedy and endless horrors, murmurs echoing against castle walls, creepy enemies moaning, "Voy a matar!" and a sense that everything wrong is perfectly right with this reworked Evil—with or without the additions made for the PlayStation 2 version of the game.

Burnout Legends

EA *XB, PS2*

Burnout Revenge is video crack, the kind of exuberant experience Beethoven was writing about when he composed Ode to Joy. The racing here is flawless, and players are rewarded for excessive speed and wanton destruction. There's always something new to do, wrecks to create, and opposing racers to jam into obstacles, and Revenge jackhammers the frantic pace from start to finish.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

2005 YEAR IN REVIEW

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY AWARDS

ACTION/ADVENTURE

GAME OF THE YEAR

God of War

Sony *PS2*

Sure, God of War grabbed us with its extreme violence, magnificent Greek-mythology setting and phenomenal presentation. But what ultimately made the game such a remarkable experience was the meticulous attention the developers paid to the finest details—especially within the perfectly engaging gameplay. As familiar as some of the design ideas may have been, their implementation was inventive and engaging. There was also an emotional underpinning to the game that few games this year even attempted, and perhaps no others succeeded with on the same level. God of War isn't just the best action-adventure game of the year. It's one of the best games every made.

MOST INNOVATIVE

NEW GAME

Shadow of the Colossus

Sony *PS2*

There were plenty of good games this year, but how many of those games could be defined as truly innovative? One stood boldly, beautifully at the top, giving us living beings to navigate as its central gameplay hook. There really has never been anything like this before, a game as original as it is emotionally gripping.

STRATEGY

GAME OF THE YEAR

Advance Wars DS

Nintendo *NDS*

Advance Wars DS provides a giant world presented on two tiny screens and miniscule heroes who battle in a war both epic in presentation and grand in scale. Turn-based combat provides opportunities not only to outfight the competition but to outthink it, and therein lies its brilliance.

RACING/DRIVING

GAME OF THE YEAR

Project Gotham Racing 3

Microsoft *Xbox 360*

Project Gotham Racing 3 represented the best yet in what was already a highly respected racing series. This game simply could not have been created a year ago. From the superior visuals and delicate balance between realism and fantasy to the awesome cars and expanded functionality of the competition, this was a dream for racing nuts.

FIRST PERSON SHOOTER
OF THE YEAR

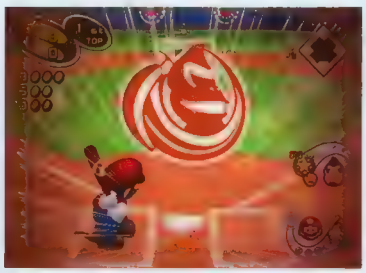
Call of Duty 2
Activision *Xbox 360*

There wasn't much arguing on this one: Call of Duty 2 was one of the must-have launch games for the Xbox 360, showcasing a craft and intensity well beyond the other first-person shooters left in its shadow. The world-war theme is getting old, but Infinity Ward and their award-winning FPS design skills march on.

EXTREME SPORTS
GAME OF THE YEAR

Mario Superstar Baseball
Nintendo *GC*

As a game of legitimate baseball, Mario Baseball was not the ticket. As a riotous, humorous, endlessly addictive spin on the game Nintendo-style, it was as much fun to play the hundredth time as the first. It's good to have a two-player game this much fun you don't have to go online with to enjoy.



MOVIE-BASED
GAME OF THE YEAR

KING KONG
Ubisoft *All*

In a world where getting one perspective and one play style right seems a daunting prospect, it's astounding Ubisoft pulled off two perspectives and play styles in such a convincing manner. Kong is as stylish as the movie that inspired it, and possibly more fun than a barrel of gigantic monkeys.

BEST ACHIEVEMENT IN SOUND

Call of Duty 2
Never before has video warfare seemed so real and so dangerous. Call of Duty 2 brings the thunder of artillery, the chatter of guns, and the screams of battle to life in one, gigantic and cacophonous roar. Two expertly presents an aural bombardment, a symphony for a horrific war.

FIGHTING
GAME OF THE YEAR

Soul Calibur 3
[illegible]

BEST GRAPHICS
OF THE YEAR

Resident Evil 4
Capcom *GC, PS2*

There wasn't much debate on this one. Resident Evil 4 boasted an amazingly rich, creatively triumphant visual space that begged us to declare it the year's best before we had even finished it. From the animation to the design to the overall technical prowess, Resident Evil 4 was a graphics masterpiece.

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY AWARDS

ROLE PLAYING

GAME OF THE YEAR

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

Square Enix *PS2*

What a joy this game is! A return to the old-school and all its charm— classic role-playing parts lovingly assembled for an unforgettable adventure. Towns to explore, monsters to slay, colorful characters and endearing sidekicks to bond with: there is nothing like a great role-playing game, and Dragon Quest VIII was a pure masterpiece for its kind.

Press ✕ to talk.
Press △ to return.
Angelo
I hope we can all be friends.
So, why don't we use the world map we were just given to decide where to head next?

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

TED PRICE

"RESIDENT EVIL 4"

Capcom *GC/PS2*

SIM/TACTICS

Battalion Wars

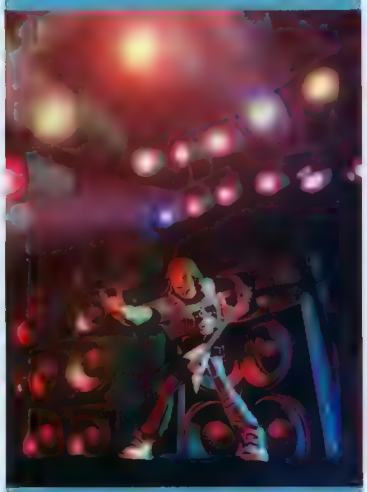
Nintendo *GC*

If you like your war simulations hyper exaggerated, big on strategic deployment and action-packed, Kuju has your marching orders. Battalion Wars is the perfect melding of action and realistic military prowess all wrapped in an easily discernable package that's impossible to put down.

MUSIC

GAME OF THE YEAR

Guitar Hero



ONLINE

GAME OF THE YEAR

Halo 2 / Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack

Microsoft *XB*

With the release of the nine-map multiplayer pack, the first-person shooter Halo 2 reasserted its online dominance. To this day, it remains one of the most solid multiplayer experiences offered by any console; For Xbox, it is the game that definitively proved it's good to play together.

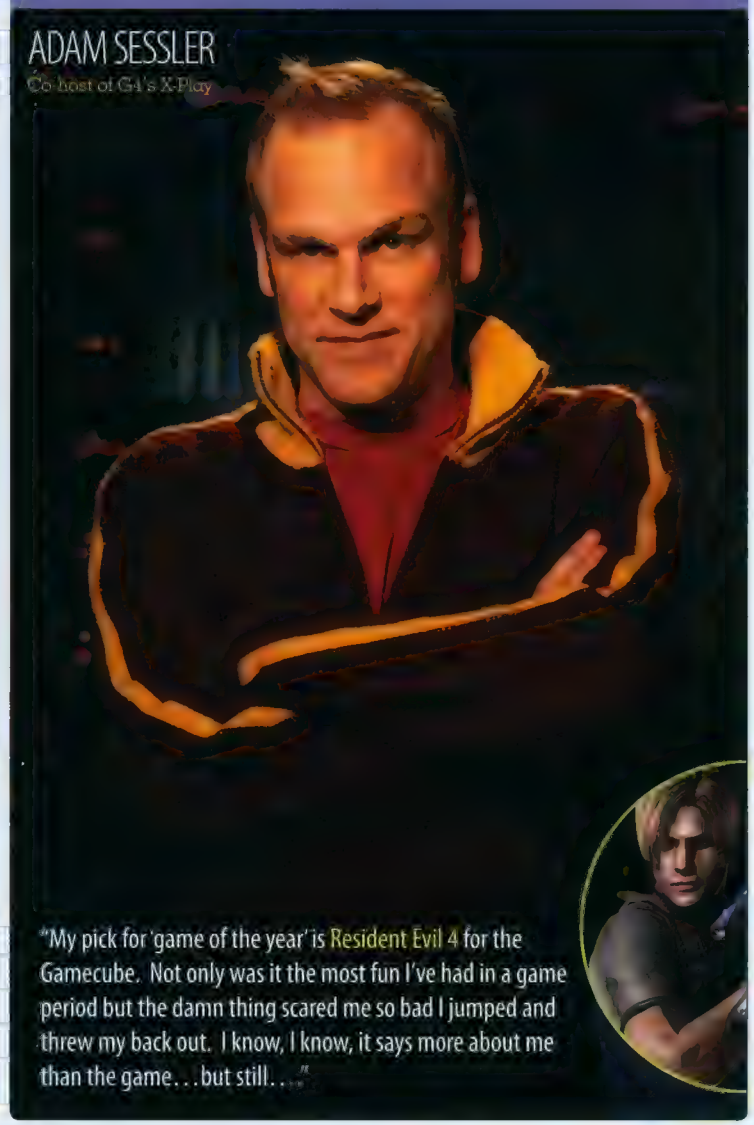
[INDUSTRY PICKS]

MORGAN WEBB
Co-host of G4's X-Play

"My pick for 'game of the year' is God of War. You're a troubled mythical anti-hero tasked with defeating Aries, the insane and rampaging god of war. Your flying Blades of Chaos wreak bloody havoc on the medusas and harpies and that are the minions of the deranged god. What's not to like?"

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

ADAM SESSLER
Co-host of G4's X-Play



"My pick for 'game of the year' is Resident Evil 4 for the Gamecube. Not only was it the most fun I've had in a game period but the damn thing scared me so bad I jumped and threw my back out. I know, I know, it says more about me than the game...but still..."

BEST CO-OP
GAME OF THE YEAR

The Warriors

BEST CINEMAS
OF THE YEAR

Resident Evil 4
Capcom *GC, PS2*

When El Gigante enters the frame... when the villagers stop to stare in pure evil... when Leon barely escapes the next outrageous death trap... when the scene is so exciting to watch you have to pause for a breather... RE4 hits us with one incredible cinematic break after another.

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY AWARDS

ACTION/PLATFORM

GAME OF THE YEAR

Psychonauts

Majesco *XB, PS2*

Never mind how a man whose game of the year is We Heart Katamari crafts the best thing to happen to platforming since Super Mario 64, just revel in it and be happy that he doesn't make the kinds of games he enjoys playing. I kid, of course.

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

TIM SCHAFER

"We Love Katamari"

Namco *PS2*

SPORTS

GAME OF THE YEAR

V-Tennis World Tour

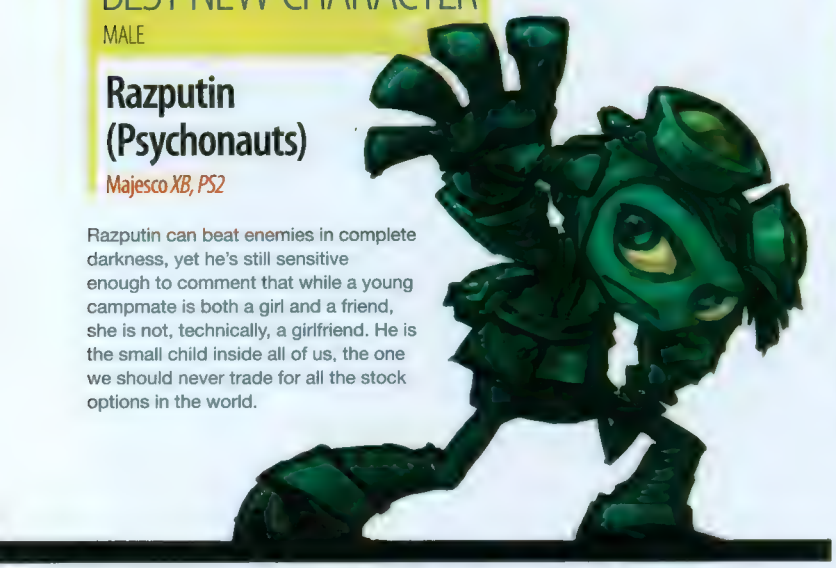
BEST NEW CHARACTER

MALE

Razputin (Psychonauts)

Majesco *XB, PS2*

Razputin can beat enemies in complete darkness, yet he's still sensitive enough to comment that while a young campmate is both a girl and a friend, she is not, technically, a girlfriend. He is the small child inside all of us, the one we should never trade for all the stock options in the world.



BEST NEW CHARACTER

FEMALE

Kameo (Kameo)

Microsoft *Xbox 360*

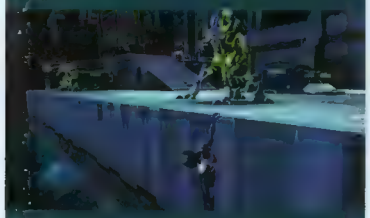
A more graceful and altogether alluring leading lady you will not find. She's loyal, tough, resourceful, magical, diplomatic when she needs to be, and doesn't mind sharing her body with 10 fairy tale creatures. Say hello, and goodbye, to Kameo.

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

Tommy Tallarico

Advent Rising

Majesco *XB*



Veteran (it feels funny saying that) video game maestro Tommy Tallarico pulled out all the stops for the Mustard Brothers' ambitious vision, ultimately providing the fuel to propel the game in spite of its blemishes, while creating one of gaming's best Sci-Fi opuses in the process.

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

TOMMY TALLARICO

"Shadow of the Colossus"

Sony *PS2*

"It was just so different and beautiful to play. I was a big ICO fan as well and to play something as unique as this (especially in this day and age of sequels) was very refreshing."

BEST SOUNDTRACK

OF THE YEAR

Guitar Hero

Harmonix *PS2*

Deep Purple, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Bowie, Megadeth, Black Sabbath, Motorhead, Judas Priest, Blue Oyster Cult, Queen, Pantera...need we say more? Okay, Queens of the Stone Age and White Zombie...

BONEHEAD QUOTE OF THE YEAR

50 cent who told Hackers that his game is OK for kids, and could be used to teach them life lessons. "Just because it is rated Mature doesn't mean you shouldn't buy it for your kids." "Play the game and explain to them what they are playing." Er, so, that would be a gun and that would be the dead guy you shot with it. Any questions?

BEST ENGINE

OF THE YEAR

Shadow of the Colossus

Sony *PS2*

Shadow of the Colossus pushed the PlayStation 2 to its limit, rendering every visual effect in the book while writing a few new pages of its own. What really impressed was the engine's ability to provide such enormous models, in the form of the colossi, which animated so beautifully within a strikingly vast landscape.

GENRE MOST IN NEED OF A MAJOR OVERHAUL

FPS

CORRIDOR FOR ONE

Condemned designed its way right out of the traditional FPS category, carving out its own survival horror/exploration first person action path. An award worthy performance all its own.

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY AWARDS

CHARACTER DESIGN
OF THE YEAR

Magna Carta
Atlus *PS2*

Hyung-Tae Kim's interpretations of the human form are among the most exquisite you will see in any medium, and his creature and costume design both follow suit, placing him among the world's most elite character designers. Seeing his designs come to life in Magna Carta 2 on Xbox 360 will surely be one of 2006's highlights.

DEBACLES

Losing Oddworld on the heels of their best game ever; watching The Red Star crash and burn with Acclaim; and BC becoming extinct (although it is rumored to be 360-bound).

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

DAVID PERRY

"KING KONG"
Ubisoft *All*

BEST PERFORMANCE
MALE

RICHARD HORVITZ
Razputin

Psychonauts
Majesco *PS2, XB*

Comedian cum voice actor Richard Horvitz (Invader Zim) stands out as Psychonauts' young circus boy Razputin. He's flexible enough to capture the vulnerability of youth one minute and then subtly shift gears to deliver bits of comedy. Dare it be said? His performance is, simply, brainy.

BEST PERFORMANCE
FEMALE

ROSE McGOWAN
Tala

Darkwatch
Capcom *PS2, XB*

Rose went from sleeping with everyone's favorite mutant to bedding down the real thing in half-breed Jericho Cross; trading in a night of passion for the bite that would win her immortality and if she plays her cards just right dominion over all living (soon to be dead) things.

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

AMY HENNIG

"Shadow of the Colossus"
Sony *PS2*

DS SURPRISES

Go DS! Nintendo once again proves that it's the games that count, surprising us with one great release after another.

PSP FIZZLES OUT OF THE GATE

The promise is still there for an impressive future, but where were the killer games in 2005? Where are the widescreen 2D games?

[INDUSTRY PICKS]

CLIFF BLESZINSKI

Lead Designer, Epic Games

"Resident Evil 4"
Capcom *GC, PS2*

BEST LEVEL/GAME DESIGN

OF THE YEAR

God of War

Sony *PS2*

God of War also pushed the PS2 graphics envelope and in the process pretty much rewrote the book on action-adventure gaming, adding additional layers of control, platforming, melee fighting and interaction. No two levels were alike and not a single one felt recycled.

BEST STORY/SCRIPT

OF THE YEAR

Psychonauts

Majesco *PS2, XB*

This is a thinking man's adventure, with a great story and dialogue to match. One brief peek inside a paranoid's brain—where a bouquet of flowers magically transforms a young psychic boy into a grieving widow without altering his appearance—more than hints at the delightful story powering Psychonauts.

THE LAST STARFIGHTER

Starfox Assault was the year's ONLY traditional shooter (happily it was also a very good one). The shooter seems officially dead in the USA. What a shame.

BEST USE OF 'E' RATING

Sly 3

Sony *PS2*

When it comes to producing a universe as engrossing for kids as it is adults no one does it better than Sucker Punch. How this series has avoided the spotlight outside of gaming eludes us all. Death Jr. toys are out now and there's an anime in the works and Viewtiful Joe is on the WB. Does Sony's prowess begin and end with games?

BEST USE OF 'M' RATING

God of War

Sony *PS2*

Thank you for making "mature" stand for more than thugs and gunplay. Thank you for getting Kratos laid between acts and full frontal with nipples, and thank you for letting us not just crack heads, but run them through, complete with vibration.

INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY AWARDS

MOST UNDER-RATED
GAME OF THE YEAR

Phantom Dust
Majesco XB

Arena fighting coupled with role playing within a future world that consumes all comers—Phantom Dust was and remains the best original Xbox game to come out of Japan. Whether played alone or over Live, the game's 300 skills transform the "protagonist" into a nimble god and the character design (by Panzer Dragoon creator/director Yukio Futatsugi) and music are the epitome of 3D art and sound. Amazingly, this game was $20 dollars.

MOST OVER-RATED
GAME OF THE YEAR

Perfect Dark Zero
Microsoft 360

Perfect Dark Zero is a good game for sure but after being heralded as the Halo of the Xbox 360 it certainly hasn't lived up to the hype. Some lackluster missions, a complete lack of plausibility, too few (and too easy) bosses, and no legs keep Joanna from Master Chief Status.

TRENDS...
...boding well/ill for the game industry

WELL
...imaginative and cost-effective original games like Lumines and Tokobot that don't have to sell a zillion copies to turn a profit.

Original IPs hung on through the toughest year yet for original content. God of War, Psychonauts, Kameo, Darkwatch, Stubbs the Zombie, Shadow of the Colossus, Death Jr., Killer 7, Condemned, Tokobot, Magna Carta and Oddworld Stranger's Wrath proved once again that there's more to life than sequels and mega brands.

Movie games that live up to their namesakes: Peter Jackson's King Kong, The Warriors, The Incredibles: Rise of the Underminer, and Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogies Revenge were all exceptional games in their own right.

The shared experience – Except for the jerks, it is good to play together.

Good stories in games – Psychonauts, Call of Cthulhu, Condemned, and Oddworld all tell compelling stories and show that games can inspire both the hands and senses.

The RPG shows an upswing in support, represented by one of the best, if not the best, ever in the genre, Dragon Quest VIII.

Xbox Live Arcade shows fantastic promise, opening the door for endless possibilities, both with old games coming back, and newer, simpler games being reintroduced.

Classic game services like Gametap bode well for reigniting the love of old-school.

ILL
Price gouging and shortages so bad your new console ends up launching on eBay.

War Games: ENOU[illegible]H!!

First person[illegible]ers with[illegible]feet and magic ladder[illegible]and swimm[illegible]May we have appendages please?

Retail super stores denying shelf space to great games because they're from a small publisher or not a big brand. You ate our Mom 'n' pops; at least do an honest business.

Platformer/fantasy/E game bashing. Silence is golden and in this case would be greatly appreciated.

Complaints about 15-20 hour long games being too short (a.k.a. proof there's no school for video game journalism).

Game TV overload. We don't need shows on cinemas or how to make a flotation device out of an old keyboard. X-Play and Electric Playground get the job done just fine.

THE SEEMINGLY UNEDUCATED CONTINUE TO BASH

It was a noisy year for the game haters. From Hillary Clinton and her Hot Coffee tirade to Jack Thompson's vitriolic rail against violence, the anti-industry brigade was out in record force.

AND FURTHERMORE...

The port parade marches on stronger than ever.

Loading gets *worse* on Xbox 360.

The top ten is dominated by sequels and licenses.

Fantasy takes a back seat to realism.

Movies based on games continue their awful reputation: Uwe Bowll leads the pack.

The used and rental market continues to eat into legitimate sales.

In-game advertising heats up.

Microtransactions! — Thank you, Microsoft. Here's a little bit more of our money.

Exclusive licenses for sports — Boo to the NFL.

BEST CONSOLE
OF THE YEAR

SONY PLAYSTATION 2

Aside from turning their backs on the kinds of games that earned the PS2 its reputation as the every man's and woman's) console, Sony has played every card just right somehow producing a stack of killer apps just as the 360 sets sail; more than enough to keep their patrons happy until the PS3 steamrolls into town.

EXCLUSIVE PLAYSTATION 2
GAME OF THE YEAR

Shadow of the Colossus
Sony *PS2*

The Xbox and GameCube offered no game that even remotely resembled Shadow of the Colossus. It was the year's most esoteric endeavor, a sort of big-budget art-house achievement that deserves respect for its artistic ambitions alone. Whatever its shortcomings, Shadow of the Colossus will be remembered long after the end of the PS2.

EXCLUSIVE GAMECUBE
GAME OF THE YEAR

Other than its punchy sports titles, Nintendo was devoid of any major first-party games. Killer 7 and RE 4 needed the cash cow PS2 to make ends meet and Zelda decided to sit '05 out and perhaps pull a Kameo. Time will tell. Thanks to Battalion Wars and a strong DS showing, all was still very well.

Battalion Wars
Nintendo *GC*

EXCLUSIVE XBOX
GAME OF THE YEAR

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
EA XB

Oddworld's hallowed trek chronicling a hero stripped of his pride and born anew was unlike anything that came before it, and filled with glorious panoramas that will live on forever. Out of tragedy a classic was born as the industry lost one of its best in the process.

OVERALL
GAME OF THE YEAR

God of War
Sony PS2

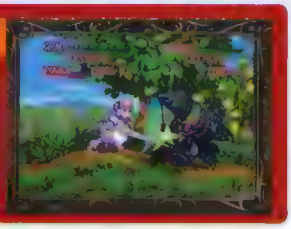
2005 BEST HANDHELD GAMES

TOP 10 PSP GAMES OF THE YEAR

PSP IMPORT GAME OF THE YEAR

Princess Crown

It's not that Atlus doesn't want to bring out Princess Crown (the best PSP game available by an immeasurable degree), it's just that they can't because, well . . . Japan lost the code. Buy the import, know the power that was Sega Saturn 2D. Okay . . . Sega... Astal please.



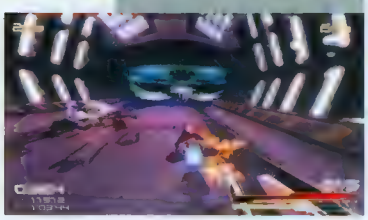
10 SOCOM
Sony

While diminished (or simplified, depending on your perspective) from the PS2, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo proved to be an excellent tactical shooter, offering a variety of engaging missions and the added support of multiplayer. As good as its big brother in the ways that

09 Burnout Legends
EA

Burnout does racing, but with a sledgehammer mentality. The goal here is not just to win, but to wreck the other guy in the process. Here, reckless driving is rewarded with ever-greater speed, and plenty of unlockable cars await skilled drivers. Six-player competitions via Wi-Fi only sweeten the deal.

08 Wipeout Pure
Sony



We've all been huge fans of the Wipeout series since its bold inception on PlayStation; having the futuristic racing back in peak condition on PSP was one of the reasons to own Sony's new handheld. This series has always been about slick style and blinding speed, and the PSP preserved it all.

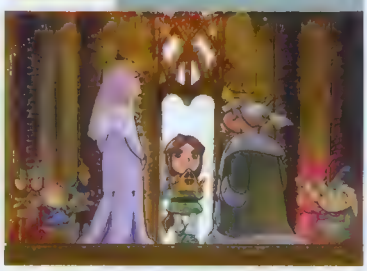
07 GTA: Liberty City
Rockstar

Crime pays big dividends in Grand Theft Auto's first foray on the PSP. Delicately blending high-octane crime with bizarre side missions including noodle delivery and car salesmanship, this all-new Auto packs all the punch of its console counterparts and even manages to outdo them with 6-player WiFi options.

06 V-Tennis
Sega

Virtua Tennis: World Tour was tennis at its best on Dreamcast, and now you can take it anywhere you want on PSP. On top of offering a hugely entertaining take on the sport, V- Tennis upped the ante with all sorts of minigames and a global stats-building tour that proved a formidable challenge.

05 PoPoLoCrois
Agetec



As the sun set on PSP 2005, we were finally met with some original RPGs, of which PoPoLoCrois emerged as the clear victor and perhaps trend setter. With any luck, its engaging story and gorgeous hand-drawn visuals will mount a renaissance of sorts for sprite-based RPGs.

04 Death Jr.
Konami

The PSP's first franchise player was met with mixed reviews but only for its difficulty and tricky camera. Everyone loves DJ. For the platforming elite who've never met a camera they can't tame, Death, Jr. is arguably one of the best 3D action-shooters you'll ever have the privilege of playing.

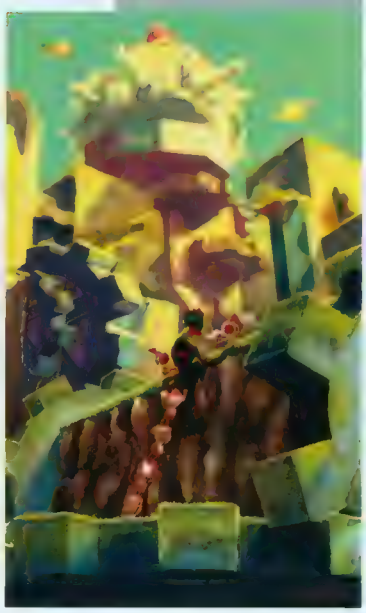
03 MediEvil
Sony

Sir Daniel Fortesque was back in top undead-knight form in MediEvil: Resurrection, the spirited action-adventure remade from the excellent series on PlayStation. Blending puzzles, action, platforming and clever humor, the game was a blast from start to finish.

02 Lumines
Bandai

It's been a long time since a puzzle game this maddeningly addictive has come our way, and what better place to house such a treat than on a handheld? Lumines borrowed its mechanics from classic titles we've played before, but the incorporation of sound into the mix is what finally made this game so fresh and fun.

01 Tokobot
Tecmo



Part action-adventure and part real-time brain teaser, Tokobot combines the pick-up-and-playability of a mobile game with console-style level design and graphics . . . but most of all it's just insanely fun. Wrapped in an archeological guise complete with a wacky professor and a grown-up story, this is the kind of original game that will fuel the PSP in the years ahead.

NINTENDO DS TOP 10
GAMES OF THE YEAR

10 Wario Ware Touched!
Nintendo

Wario Ware Touched is the rare sort of game that can transform the mundane act of spinning a roll of toilet paper into something (mildly) exciting. It's goofy, frantic fun, and possessed of enough charm and odd gameplay to win it a place on this list.

09 Trauma Center
Atlus

We at Play are not doctors, although we do like to impersonate them at parties. And with Trauma Center: Under the Knife, we can live out our most gruesome surgery fantasies without the unpleasantness of blood sprays, nausea, and passing out. Scrub up, young ones, because these tumors won't remove themselves.

08 Viewtiful Joe Double Trouble
Capcom

It should come as no surprise that Viewtiful Joe took so well to the DS's split screen format. Using the touch screen to manipulate objects in the background added yet another dimension to gaming's only 2D franchise. You are hereby commanded to buy everything bearing the name.

07 Metroid Pinball
Nintendo

It would have been easy to slap Metroid-themed bits on a pinball game and ship it out the door. Instead, Fuse Games created a Metroid game featuring its protagonist Samus rolling around in a pinball world. It's a neat twist on an old classic, and it soars.

06 Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney
Capcom

Not since Lionel Hutz' false advertising suit against the makers of The Neverending Story has one attorney so completely won over the American public. Phoenix Wright is a man for the people, the star of a brilliant logic-based game that makes it perfectly acceptable to yell legalese in public.

05 Mario and Luigi: Partners in Time
Nintendo

A smart and funny RPG, Mario & Luigi takes great pride in poking fun at the Nintendo canon, while still presenting players with a sweeping story and lots of platforming and combat-based obstacles. And, to be frank, teaming the beloved brothers with their younger selves is a stroke of brilliance.

BEST SOUNDTRACK

Castlevania:DoS

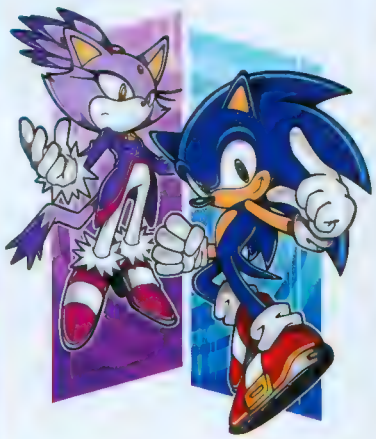
Surprise! . . . Actually, Yamane had some stiff competition this year from Death, Jr. and Sonic Rush. In the end, however, she knows all too well where our buttons are and somehow continues to press them.

04 Advance Wars DS
Nintendo

The dogs of war run rampant in this turn-based strategy game. Advance Wars DS provides the battlegrounds and the tools of destruction, and then challenges players to use them wisely, either against skilled A.I. opponents or human beings. Give peace a chance, but certainly not on the Nintendo DS.

03 Sonic Rush
Sega

Rush is the 2D sequel Sonic fans have been waiting for since 16-bit (and 2D with it) crashed and burned, with the added bonus of an extra screen on which to play, spectacular 3D bosses, and a return to the original mold which consisted of more than just speed thrills. This is 2D of the highest order.



02 Mario Kart DS
Nintendo

It's one thing having the Mario Kart series resurrected in new form for the DS; it's just that much better being able to enjoy the manic kart racing over Wi-Fi, taking on gamers from across the world as you relive the wild fun of this classic series. The new tracks continued the matchless Mario Kart tradition.

01 Castlevania:DoS
Konami

The Castlevania series has been around since the early NES days, and somehow it still manages to dazzle while sticking to the elegant basics that have powered the games for so many years. Here again we get a gorgeous castle to explore, filled with Gothic wonders and endlessly engrossing gameplay.

GAME BOY ADVANCE TOP 10

10 Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones
Nintendo

Tactics fans got their fill in 2005 via a banner Fire Emblem sequel that improved on both the game's graphics and gameplay, adding branching promotion paths, an overworld map, and tower and ruins battles to level up before battle.

09 Shaman King: Master of Spirits 2
Konami

MoS 2 may look a lot like the original but there was much new to celebrate in Konami's latest 2D epic. If you're going to create a Castlevania clone based on a hit anime series might as well go to the source. The beautiful thing is that they're different enough to justify owning both.

08 Nightmare Before Christmas: TPK
Buena Vista

They take their NBC seriously in Japan, as evidenced by TOSE Software's engaging old-school Metroid-style 2D prequel that chronicles how Jack met his arch-rival: everyone's favorite bag-o-bugs, Oogie Boogie.

07 Mega Man Zero 4
Capcom

Hand drawn 2D hasn't looked this good since Mega Man Zero 3 as the red bomber took on the Neo Arcadian army bolstered by the new Zero Knuckle, an item recipe system and adjustable difficulty should the insane patterns drive you bonkers.

06 Sigma Star Saga
Namco

Developed by WayForward (Scorpion King), Sigma Star is the first GBA RPG to combine classic role playing with a 2D space-shooter. . . A real shooter; not some mini-game. We'd love to see a jump to console on this one.

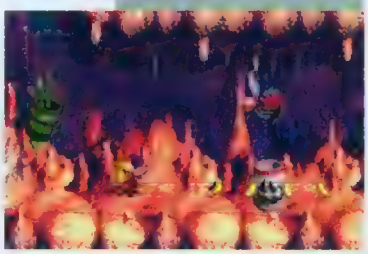
05 Racing Gears Advance
Orbital Media

The GBA isn't a very formidable 3D machine, so if you want to race look no further. This is the best racing game for the system bar none. In fact, you'll not find better top down driving anywhere.

04 Klonoa 2
Namco

Classic Klonoa gameplay met with the immediacy and diversity of a tournament universe, brought more puzzles and boss Visions to the familiar action mold, along with a colorful cast of new adversaries to bolster the brand that platform fans hold so dear.

03 Donkey Kong Country 3
Nintendo



A painful reminder of how much we miss Rare flying the Nintendo flag; Dixie's debut in DKC 3 remains every bit the side-scrolling sensation it was on the SNES. We missed you on GC.

02 Gunstar Super Heroes
Sega

Stupendous is the word that comes to mind. . . right before short. Even by traditional 2D standards Super Heroes is a short game, although it changes depending on whether you play as Red or Blue and its sell-by date is infinite (replayability is off the charts). Not enough to beat Zelda, but an absolute classic game that every GBA owner should covet.

01 The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap
Nintendo

Coming off of Four Swords Adventures, Miyamoto and Inafune kept the A Link to the Past-style Zelda adventure interesting by going microscopic, rigging Link with new special abilities, and adding new elements such as Kinstone fusion. You've never seen Hyrule like this before.

BEST MOVIE OR TV BASED:

The Incredibles: Rise of the Underminer THQ DS

THQ has done a stunning job with the Incredibles license on every front with Heavy Iron doing the console honors and now Helixe's exceptional DS game that features the same dual-character gameplay, as Frozone and Mr. Incredible endeavor to take down the hardware-heavy Underminer.

play PC

2005 Year in Review

PC gaming in the year 2005 was a diverse affair. A great hybrid like Guild Wars demonstrated that online RPGs needn't adopt formulaic designs or rigid business models to succeed. Valve's commitment to indie support through Steam allowed gems like Darwinia to find a larger audience. FEAR checked-in with a sumptuously sophisticated first person action experience, while Battlefield 2 kicked multiplayer FPS standards up a notch or ten. To feed hungry titles like FEAR and Call of Duty 2, a Frankenstein dream came true in 2005: twin 512 MB next-gen video cards running together in SLI. Enough image quality and speed to make a grown man cry.

Around mid-2006, Microsoft is going to drop Vista (the new Windows) on the world, and the transition to a more powerful PC operating system will begin in earnest. With dual and triple core AMD FX processors poised to enter the mix in early and late '06, monstrous gaming power is all but assured. Titles like Huxley and Age of Conan will happily take advantage of the raw power, and it will be interesting to see which developers make the leap to full multi-processor support. If id Software's recent Quake 4 update is any indication (boosting multi-thread performance by up to 80%), we hope that other developers step up to the plate.

The PC platform will also make some noise in the next-gen independent scene, as more developers team up, BioWare Pandemic-style, during 2006. With several affordable licensed engines and new distribution options, as well as scores of asset workshops to pump out trivial world objects and textures, independent teams large and small may have a good opportunity to dodge the publisher treadmill. Let's hope this encourages more risk-taking in design. Who knows? It might rub off on the rest of the industry.

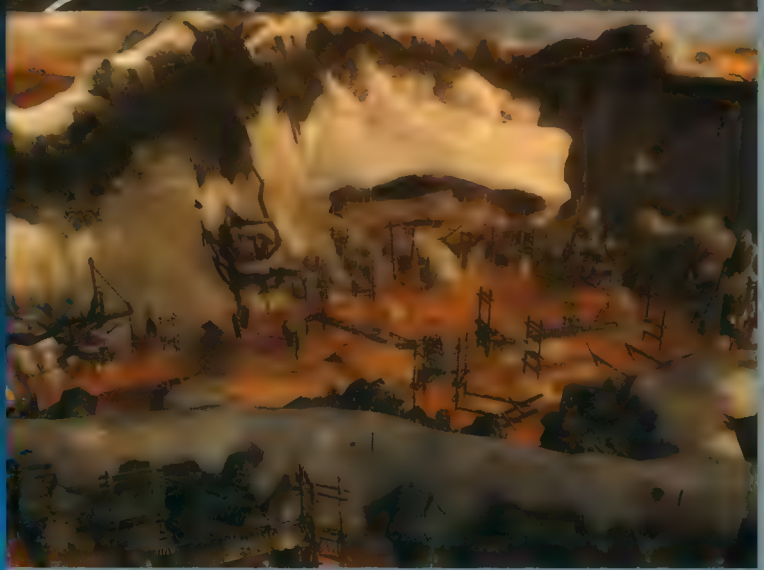
// PC Game of the Year

Guild Wars

Developer: ArenaNet **Publisher:** NCsoft

Guild Wars brought far too much to the table in 2005 to overlook as the year's best PC title. For starters, though Guild Wars comes very close to providing the ancillary depth of a full pay-to-play persistent world game, it remains subscription-free for gamers worldwide. September's free update revealed a massive chunk of world geography in the core of a snow-covered mountain range, adding quests and new items. International PvP tournaments continue, including post-season gameplay leading up to the $100,000 World Championship — set to be played at the Taipei Game Show in mid-February. The second Guild Wars campaign is going to roll out as a massive expansion in a few months.

So what makes Guild Wars 2005's best? It has an enormous campaign that would satisfy any RPG player. You can fill your party with NPC henchmen, so there's always a viable soloing option. GW allows instant travel to any discovered town and convenient group-making systems. The skill pool for characters is ridiculously deep, but there are ways to offset or neutralize any skill. That's the brilliant part about combat in Guild Wars: though every profession draws from a large pool of powers, only eight specific abilities may be loaded at once. When you leave town, those eight selections are locked-in. No set of abilities is totally dominant. Every power has a potential counter if the wielder is skilled enough to spot an opening. And it's all played out in battle at an exquisitely fierce pace. Did we mention that Guild Wars is gorgeous and runs smoothly on almost any modern PC? Congratulations to ArenaNet on an extraordinary first effort.



"Guild Wars brought far too much to the table in 2005 to overlook as the year's best PC title."

// Best Budget Game

Space Hack

Developer: Rebelmind **Publisher:** Meridian4

If you have a hankering for classic Diablo-style gameplay, look no further than Space Hack. Tons of monsters and items to keep you hooked, all for about $20.

// Best First Person Shooter – Single player

FEAR

Developer: Monolith Productions **Publisher:** VU Games

FEAR's campaign is mature, well-written and supported by great voice work. The supernatural fright effects are seamlessly integrated into the experience, thickening the game's wonderfully stark urban ambiance but never smothering the proceedings with excess. The bombast strikes loudest when FEAR's excellent action set-pieces begin, aided by the best use of the perspective since Half-Life 2. Speed and collision feel great. Recoil, leaning, jump kicks, slide kicks, using ladders... it all bears the mark of expert FPS design. FEAR's single-player campaign is essential play.

Honorable mention: Call of Duty 2
Pure intensity, unforgiving violence, huge production values: with its spectacular campaign, Call of Duty 2 reigns over all other historical military shooters.

// Best Action RPG

Guild Wars

Developer: ArenaNet **Publisher:** NCsoft

Guild Wars is more akin to an online action role playing game than a full blown MMORPG, and it doesn't take long to see why. Everything from travel to crafting is totally streamlined, making each online session a progressive breeze to log in and out of. The GW team has maintained its mantra about having fun right away, not spending your time *preparing* to have fun—jumping through mundane hoops—like so many online RPGs demand. Guild Wars lives by this credo. And the action at its core makes for truly superior PvP combat.

Honorable mention: Fable: The Lost Chapters
One of the best PC titles around and a fantastic update of the original Fable, TLC comes much closer to realizing Molyneux's ambitious vision.

// Best First Person Shooter – Multiplayer

Battlefield 2

Developer: Digital Illusions **Publisher:** EA Games

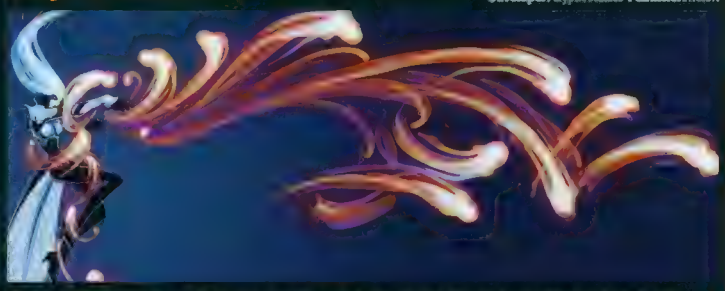
Battlefield 2 is the only online shooter we keep going back to. Tearing across large-scale conquest maps in highly controllable air, land and water vehicles is extremely fun. Every new spawn is an opportunity to witness completely over-the-top action: dogfights overhead between screaming-fast military aircraft, jeeps plowing into fleeing infantry, dueling tanks blasting at each other before a massive artillery strike decimates them both. The unpredictable human element is endlessly entertaining in such a well-crafted multiplayer shooter, and tools are present to reward organized squads. While the derivative console versions are strong, the definitive multiplayer BF 2 experience resides on PC.

Honorable mention: Day of Defeat: Source
Day of Defeat: Source launched with a small selection of maps, but nobody could deny the integrity of the core DoD design. A great, addictive multiplayer shooter.

// Best MMORPG

City of Villains

Developer: Cryptic Studios Publisher: NCsoft



We've already bestowed ample kudos upon Guild Wars, and it really doesn't adhere to typical MMO standards. For this category we turn to City of Villains. CoV preserves the core gameplay model of City of Heroes and it's just as accessible. The seemingly limitless character creation mode still owns the genre. Combat is faster and more kinetic than most MMOs, with less reliance on cliché group structure. The PvP is straightforward, rewarding and conducted in discreet zones. Most importantly, City of Villains completes Cryptic's vast MMO comic universe. Just don't expect GTA-style villainous mayhem; this is an online RPG after all. . . a very good one.

Honorable mention: **World of Warcraft**
Yes, it's a 2004 release. However, WoW enjoyed tons of big, Blizzard-quality updates throughout 2005—earning your subscription dollars and its No. 1 spot in the genre.

// Best Adventure Game

Indigo Prophecy

Developer: Quantic Dream Publisher: Atari

If not for a few fuzzy pacing decisions and some technical flaws, Indigo Prophecy could have been a contender for game of the year on any platform. As it stands, this is the best adventure title of '05 and one of the most stimulating and inventive titles the genre has ever known. The rhythmic control elements are tempered by fantastic direction, storytelling, and characters you really care about.

Honorable mention: **Myst V: End of Ages**
Cyan Worlds returned to cap off the venerable series, giving fans one more dose of clever puzzles across exotic worlds in an attractive, classy adventure.

// Best VO Performance

Sharon Mann as Carla Valenti, Indigo Prophecy

Sharon delivers a great performance, revealing Carla's warmth, intelligence and vulnerability.

// Best Artificial Intelligence

FEAR

Play any modern FPS on its highest difficulty setting and you'll often see some painfully "good" AI. It isn't difficult to give a non player character superhuman accuracy or avoidance. The real challenge is to create *entertaining* AI behavior. No PC game in 2005 could top the engaging enemy AI displays of FEAR. This thrilling shooter's cloned super-soldiers look great in action. They hurdle over rails, dive through window frames and knock over objects to use as cover—all while relaying brief status reports to each other. The AI puts on a great show in FEAR, enhancing every encounter.

// Best Squad Tactics

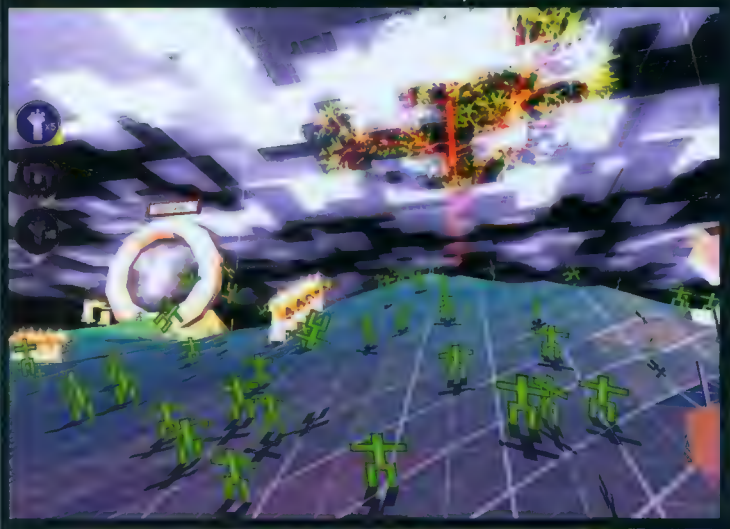
SWAT 4

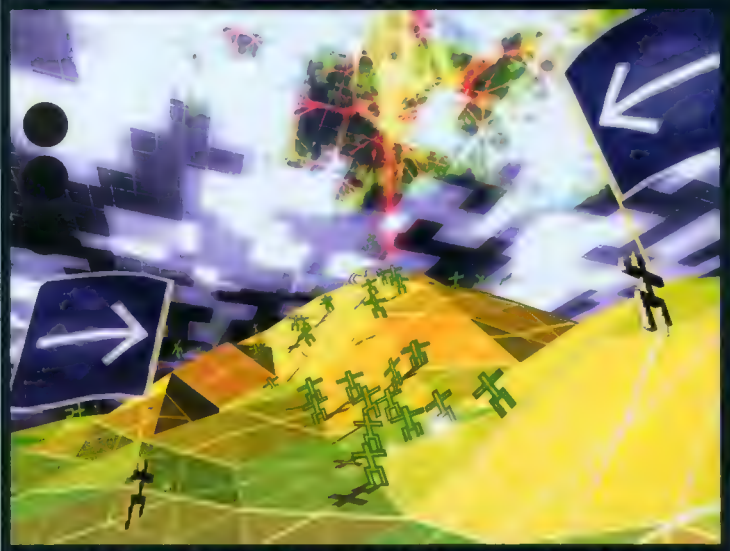
SWAT 4 triumphs as a tactical infiltration experience. The game conveys a compelling sense of place and risk as your squad navigates and manipulates its urban surroundings, suppressing—not recklessly killing—all hostility.

// Best Strategy Game

Darwinia

Developer: Introversion Software **Publisher:** Valve (Steam)





It was a good year for strategy titles, with some big name releases and welcome refinements, but no offering was quite as refreshing as Darwinia. The game's striking fractal graphics and cool electronic sounds immediately set it apart. The level design emphasizes fluid, progressive movement—not plodding resource management and base building. Unit control is intuitive, sometimes twitch-shooter fast, and the interface is sleek and minimal. Darwinia's unexpectedly poignant storyline is a lot more engaging than another history lesson.

Honorable mention: **Black & White 2**
Black & White 2 is bursting at the seams with ideas, and it coalesces into a very enjoyable blend of creature sim, city building and RTS-style warfare.

// Best Graphics – Technical

FEAR

The engine that Monolith concocted for FEAR is a triumph of slick texturing, bleeding-edge shader and particle effects, and insanely stylish POV techniques. The game's stark urban environments have a tangible sheen and the lighting precision is unreal. All this candy is naturally much sweeter on suitably powerful hardware. FEAR also boasts some of the best looking firefights ever seen in a game: you'll have chunks of the environment blowing apart, smoke and dust rising from displacement-mapped bullet holes, fits of sparks bouncing angrily from metal surfaces, physics objects flying off shelves and swaying lights extending perfect shadows across the chaos. Hit slow mo for a better look at FEAR's unbelievable bullet trail effects. Hail to king of high tech.

// Best Original Score

Indigo Prophecy

Developer: Quantic Dream **Publisher:** Atari

Normand Corbeil's moving orchestral soundtrack elevates the emotional resonance of Indigo Prophecy's intriguing narrative. These haunting strings cut through the chill of a snow-covered city.

Honorable mention: **Guild Wars**
Jeremy Soule has composed many high fantasy soundtracks, but rarely has his work harmonized so fittingly with a game world. This music makes Guild Wars a better game.

// Best Sound Design

Call of Duty 2

As terrific as Call of Duty 2 looks, the game's outstanding sound design is its highlight technical achievement. Infinity Ward infuses CoD 2's foley with mainstream Hollywood caliber completeness.

// Best Graphics – Artistic

Guild Wars

The land of Tyria is a beautiful fantasy canvas. There is a rare sophistication present here in the architectural themes; ancient symbols adorning opulent gothic constructs across a land ravaged by history. The game's climate is as varied as its native species, with summery lowlands and vivid flora, flame-scarred desert plains, and arctic peaks obscured by lovely, dream-like squalls of snow. Trees and tent flaps sway, ocean waves crash into rocky shores... the art of Guild Wars is alive and captivating.

// Best RPG

Freedom Force vs. the 3rd Reich

Developer: Irrational Games **Publisher:** VU Games

After 2004's unfortunate dearth of PC role playing games, the arrival of Irrational's Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich in early '05 made up for lost time. There hasn't been a comic-styled RPG this colorful, playable and subtly funny since... the original Freedom Force. The character performances in FFvtTR are top notch, the story mode is great fun, and it's a surprisingly mod and multiplayer-friendly RPG—a good value proposition, as it were, and a friendly community.

Honorable mention: **Dungeon Siege 2**
Dungeon Siege 2 has a solid campaign, tons of skills to flesh out and deep character and lore development. It's a fine take on the hack'n slash RPG.

// Developer's View

Scott Evans, *EA Games*
Executive Producer: Battlefield 2

Top 3 Games of 2005:

01. Guitar Hero
02. Battlefield 2
03. Call of Duty 2

Scott: "Guitar Hero is pure innovation that has unleashed my inner rockstar!"

Scott Brown, *NetDevil*
Project Lead: Auto Assault

Top 3 Games of 2005:

01. Star Wars Legos
02. World of Warcraft
03. Need for Speed Underground 2

Scott: "Star Wars Empire at War is something I have been waiting for as a gamer for a long time; it looks like it's going to be a blast. I am really looking forward to Bioware's Mass Effect as well. They always make killer game experiences. Finally, I can't wait to see Tabula Rasa. The concept sounds really exciting to me."

Looking forward to...

"More Xbox 360 Live games, the PS3 launch and seeing how Nintendo game designers will innovate through the Revolution controller."

Jack Emmert, *Cryptic Studios*
Creative Director: City of Villains

Top Picks for 2006:

01. RF Online
02. Auto Assault
03. World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade

Jack: "I'm looking forward to seeing how the new consoles affect the game market. We've been seeing a trend where the PC is being slowly shifted aside in favor of consoles; what effect will these new consoles have on this trend?"

Adrian Chmielarz, *People Can Fly*
Lead Designer: Painkiller series

Top 3 Games of 2005:

01. God of War
02. Resident Evil 4
03. Indigo Prophecy

Adrian: "Ultimately, I think I had the most fun with God of War. It's an ingenious mix of action and adventure, impossible visuals, and amazing soundtrack."

// Most Anticipated Games of 2006

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

Developer: Splash Damage **Publisher:** Activision

With great class designs and irresistibly cool vehicles from the Quake universe, ETQW is geared up to dominate multiplayer squad combat in 2006.

Huxley

Developer: Webzen **Publisher:** Webzen

Huxley is all about ambition: a grand MMOFPS design combined with staggeringly detailed graphics. This could be Webzen's breakthrough western hit.

Tabula Rasa

Developer: Destination Games **Publisher:** NCsoft

Richard Garriott's hybrid space epic blends the action and objectives of a first person shooter with the character development and world depth of a MMO.

Street Fighter Alpha Max 3

PSP

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Available:** February 2006

The beloved Street Fighter franchise comes to Sony's handheld with four new playable brawlers for Max 3 (Yun, Maki, and Eagle from Capcom vs. SNK 2 as well Ingrid from Capcom Fighting Evolution) and Wi-Fi play allowing for 8-man tournaments and two-player battles. As for the rest of the game, it remains intact (if a bit shrunken), including its selectable "Ism"-based mechanic which allows fighters to jump into combat using three separate and distinct fight styles, and Capcom sweetens the deal by adding a new tag-team mode titled "Variable Battle."

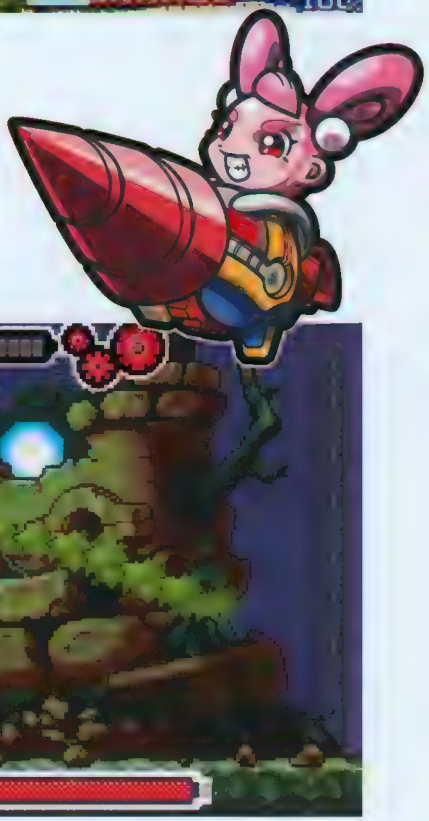
Capcom has wisely included the option to use either the PSP's analog stick and its D-pad to control the fighters in 3, and this is a godsend. The D-pad is more precise in terms of tossing fireballs and executing combination moves, but death on thumbs. The analog stick provides a decent compromise, although it makes certain moves difficult to pull off. Still, the fighting is fluid, with nary a framerate drop to be had, even during the screen-choking explosions. **Greg Orlando**

Drill Dozer

GBA

Score

Developer: Game Freak **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** N/A **Available:** February 2006



Drill Dozer is the kind of original game that made Nintendo untouchable back in the 8-bit days when they were the only name in video games. It's also anything but what the name implies. Set aside any visions of heavy equipment and prepare to meet Jill, the spunky daughter of the Red Dozers' big boss. When he ends up in critical condition after a sneak attack by the Skullker Gang, who also make off with her prized possession, a red diamond given to her by her now deceased mother, Jill is called on to pilot the Drill Dozer Robot to set things right, aided by Grunch and Gearmo, the team's resident tactician and gear-head.

Joining the ranks of those elite, hook-laden NES side-scrollers of old, such as Bionic Commando, Blaster Master and Kid Icarus (although DD has all of today's modern technological accoutrements), DD's gameplay is wildly fresh and inventive. Based on—of course—drilling, Jill needs to acquire 2nd and 3rd gears in order to bore her way across six multi-stage areas penetrating thicker and thicker walls, doors, and barriers while latching onto spin sockets and platforming to reach higher ground. With each new gear comes shifting—a great new play mechanic that adds additional layers of gameplay to each area—and the Skullkers are a formidable foe, with a knack for fashioning their own brand of mechanized WMDs.

They don't come any more addictive than this, friend. With any luck this is exactly the type of game we'll see on the Revolution. **Dave Halverson**

Mega Man Maverick Hunter X

PSP

9.0 Score

Developer: G-Artists **Publisher:** Bandai **Multiplayer:** 4p versus **Available:** September

Welcome to the wonderful world of widescreen 2D (in 3D) gaming…Took long enough. And what better way to kick things off than with Mega Man? Okay, Strider or Bionic Commando; but otherwise seeing as how Ghouls 'n' Ghosts is coming soon, the blue bomber will do just fine especially looking this fantastic. Forget any previous attempts to capture classic 2D Mega Man in 3D: Maverick Hunter X—a remake of arguably one of the best and most pivotal games in the series; Mega Man X—is now the quintessential Mega Man experience. This is where X entered the picture; the Reploid model used as the prototype for a worker class of robots meant to serve mankind, a few of which went rogue leading to the formation of an elite squad lead by X to return order... Enter Sigma and the rest is Mega Man history. The combination of the newly rendered models and environments together with the widescreen presentation and clarity of the PSP screen really punch things up for this seemingly bottomless series. Coupled with the rearranged soundtrack and voice acting for all the cut scenes and preceding each boss, it almost seems like an entirely new game…not that I'd prefer it. Mega Man X has always been among my favorites (along with the original and 8 on Saturn). The other cool thing(s) about MHX happen after you beat the game (which is also different, as they've changed things up quite a bit in each level), which unlocks a new story playable as X's arch-rival, Vile, and an anime that shines a light on events leading up to the X era of games. This is where the PSP begins to run away from the DS. Yeah, I said it. **Dave Halverson**

Mega Man Powered Up

PSP

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Available:** Early 2006

Everything old is new again with Mega Man Powered Up. Fans of the old-school platforming series will no doubt recognize its source material; Powered Up is a redone version of the original Mega Man for the Nintendo Entertainment System.

On the PSP, of course, everything looks sharper by far. And it's all very familiar 2D platforming action, except for the bits Capcom changed to make this an almost new experience. Levels have been altered, the characters receive a makeover and sport bigger craniums than ever before, and two boss characters debut in the game with their own corresponding stages. In addition, classic boss robots now appear as playable characters, and a 100-level trial mode offers brief, minigame-style challenges. For purists, the Mega Man experience can also be savored in its original state.

Mega Man stages can be created from scratch here, right down to the types of enemies inhabiting them, and this may prove to be Up's biggest draw. New items can be recovered in gameplay, with players being able to share their creations via Wi-Fi. **Greg Orlando**

"A true classic loved by many!"
-Protoculture Addicts

SUPER DIMENSION FORTRESS

MACROSS

The original anime epic with an all new English Dub

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence

Nintendo DS

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Multiplayer:** 4-player Wi-Fi **Available:** February

Pop quiz: who's the master of unlocking? If you answered the incomparable Jill Valentine, you're correct—and as a likely Resident Evil fan, can you pass up utilizing Jill's skills all over again on the Nintendo DS? Maybe you're done with the idea of going back to the now-clunky and chunky original Resident Evil, but returning to this classic game of survival horror on handheld is mighty entertaining. The game just doesn't look as good as you remember it when it made its then-shocking debut on PlayStation back in 1996, but the novelty of returning to the zombie-infested mansion that started it all makes up for the age and technology restrictions.

There's more here than a bear-bones port, and Capcom is still adding to the extras. Small changes abound, like an instant reload and half-turn, along with a map display and the ability to wield the knife and bat away zombies with the stylus. The multiplayer function will probably prove to be the most dramatic addition to the game, allowing you and a friend to team up in redirected scenarios from the solo adventure. A versus mode will also be available, which sets you up in a deadly obstacle-leaden race to freedom. **Brady Fiechter**

Monster Hunter Freedom

PSP

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Multiplayer:** 4-player Wi-Fi **Available:** Early 2006

Let freedom ring. As an adventurer in the handheld version of Monster Hunter, you have the inalienable right to perform all sorts of quests, even the ones most likely to get you eaten by a giant dragon-like Wyvern.

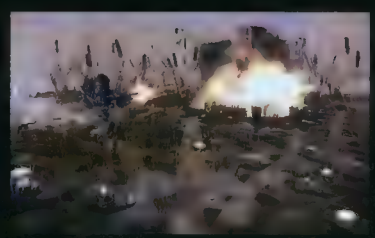
A third-person adventure, Freedom supposes clothes do make the man; a hero's fighting style is largely determined by the armor he wears and the accessories (meaning, weaponry) he totes. Once a hero is properly duded out, he can form four-man adventuring parties or go solo, can opt to tackle dangerous missions or choose instead to pluck supper from a river. Heroes in Freedom have access to their own houses and can hire feline servants to provide delicious meals. On a ranch of sorts, it's also possible to mine various ores using a pickax, grow crops, and fish—a neat sort of diversion from the main event. But the real thrill exists in venturing forth into great unknown, attempting to do the brave and foolhardy such as stealing a monster's oversized eggs and then attempting to safely waddle away with it. **Greg Orlando**

Field Commander

PSP

Developer: Sony **Publisher:** Sony **Multiplayer:** 4-player Wi-Fi **Available:** February

Following on the success of Nintendo's Advance Wars, the PSP will get its first turn-based war strategy game in Field Commander. Now comparisons between the two are inevitable, but Sony's crafted a game to stand on its own: it's less cartoonish than Wars, certainly, and more graphically detailed in terms of 3D units and combat effects, with battle taking place not on special screens, but on the gameplay maps themselves. The game also allows for more strategic elements, such as long-range fire from special operative units and mine-laying. Commander holds more than 30 single-player scenarios, as well as 15 different land-, sea-, and air-based units. Wireless play will be prominently featured, too, as will the option to create and share new battlegrounds. **Greg Orlando**



Naruto: Ninja Council

GBA

Developer: Tomy **Publisher:** D3 Publisher of America **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** Q1 2006

Based on Shonen Jump's hit anime, manga, and soon game series, Naruto: Ninja Council may just be the ultimate throwback. Resembling a 2D NES game of old along the lines of Double Dragon or Ninja Gaiden, only decked out in 32-bit color with parallax scrolling it screams retro in every way except for the graphics. Even the music pays homage—taking the traditional blips and beeps of yesteryear and bringing them up to GBA specs—for an experience that'll have you digging in the closet for your old PC Engine (TurboGrafx).

Playing as either Naruto or Sasuke, this is your classic side-scroller all the way with gameplay divided between Ninjutsu (kung-fu fighting) and using your Jutsu—scrolls to deal with environmental hazards such as fire and powers such as Sexy, Shadow, and Nine-Tailed Fox to deal with Naruto's nemeses lifted directly from the TV animation. I'm not wild about the timing aspect of the levels (although 5 minutes per sub-section is generous and adds a sense of urgency) and the bosses are all series-endemic (so pint-sized like Naruto) but these are mere grains of rice in a sweet bowl of teriyaki.

Dave Halverson

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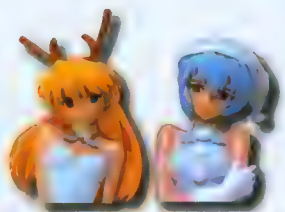

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This month saw the Japanese release of the Xbox360, though to be completely honest it was mostly a non-event, as we detail below. This report may seem harsh, but please believe us when we say we still expect the 360 to do much better in Japan than the first-generation Xbox. Given the caliber of games coming in 2006, it's a virtual certainty. Yet in a month that was supposed to be owned by the next generation, it was the current that kept us glued to our televisions: Rogue Galaxy, Ryu Ga Gotoku, MGS3 Subsistence, and most especially Kingdom Hearts II (oh, how fine it is) all provided sweet gaming grist for the mill. Things should pick up for the struggling 'Box next month, however, with DOA4 and the first orthodox Japanese-style RPG, From Software's [eM], set for release.

by Nick Des Barres & Dai Kohama

The Japan Xbox360 Launch Report

They expected to sell 100,000 units the first day. At the launch event in Shibuya, where more than 200 gamers gathered to buy 360s and view a special video message from Bill Gates, Microsoft exec Yoshihiro Maruyama even claimed, "The reign of the empire [presumably Sony] won't last much longer." Bold words, especially when one considers Microsoft ended up selling approximately 62,000 Xbox360s in Japan during December. This is roughly half what the original 'Box sold in Japan during the same time period in 2002, and only 39% of the total number of units shipped to stores. The best-selling game was Ridge Racer 6, with 30,000 copies sold, followed by Perfect Dark Zero, which moved 15,000 units. Every other game sold less than 10,000. Without a hint of drama, the Japanese Xbox360 launch can only be described as disastrous.

What happened? Nary three months ago, Microsoft seemed to have the Japanese launch nailed. They had Ridge, they had Dynasty Warriors, they had the orthodox RPG ([eM]), they had Ninety-Nine Nights, and most importantly, they had DOA4. But then things started to go wrong. First, N3 and [eM] were delayed until January. Dynasty Warriors was pushed back two weeks. N3 gets delayed again, to an unspecified spring date. Three weeks before launch, DOA4 gets postponed seven days. A week before launch, it stretches again, this time to December 29th. As a final cruel joke, Yuke's's Wrestle Kingdom gets released on the 22nd with a fatal bug, and is swiftly recalled the same day.

In short, the major factor contributing to the 360's poor performance is probably a simple lack of software. Let's not forget the American 'Box launched with *eighteen* games. Any number of other reasons can be cited, such as poor timing (Microsoft walked right into the Animal Crossing juggernaut), and poor brand image lingering from the first Xbox. With the Xbox360 launch, Microsoft has proved a classic Japanese hardware rule of thumb: You can't sell machines without a killer app. Will one of Hironobu Sakaguchi's three Xbox360-exclusive RPGs be that killer app? Will Capcom's Lost Planet? Tetsuya Mizuguchi's Ninety-Nine Nights? Something as-yet-unannounced? Only time will tell.

Special Pictorial
Japanese People Paying Little Attention To Xbox360

"These registers for Xbox360 only." They don't look very busy.

The massive DOA4 sign rakishly claims: "The Most Beautiful Thing In The World." If only it had made the launch.

An unthinkable sight in America: Stacks and stacks and stacks of unsold 360s. (And no, they're not display boxes.)

Yeah buddy, you better guard those 360s. Someone might steal them.

"...the major factor contributing to the 360's poor performance is probably a simple lack of software."

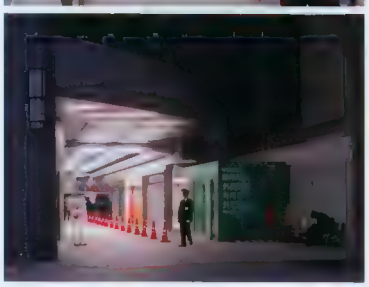
The Situation On The Street

Sofmap on launch morning. Hmm, not a single person waiting in line.

At Bic Camera in Ikebukuro, two people could be seen buying Xbox360s. They were reportedly Play Japan editors Nick Des Barres and Dai Kohama.

Yamagiwa SOFT on launch morning. Hey now, where are all the people? As far as we can tell, there are zero (0) people on Chuo Doori waiting in line.

Whew, finally! We knew the Shinjuku Yodobashi wouldn't disappoint. This is *the* premier lining-up store in all of Japan. For example, last year the PSP drew 1,000 people. The 360 made do with roughly 50.



Oh, here we go! We count eight hardy souls waiting for 360s at the Akihabara Yodobashi Camera. Judging by the guard, ropes and cones, it appears they were expecting a few more than that.

Shinjuku Yodobashi Camera: Lines By The Numbers

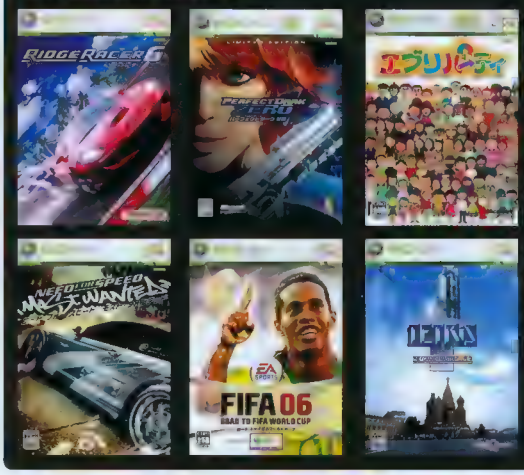
Dragon Quest III (1988):
Approximately 10,000 people

PlayStation Portable (2004):
Approximately 1,000 people

Nintendo DS (2004):
Approximately 100 people

Xbox360 (2005):
Approximately 50 people

The Launch Games



Ridge Racer 6 Namco ¥7140 ($61)

Perfect Dark Zero Microsoft/Rare ¥7140 ($61)

Everyparty Microsoft/Game Republic — ¥6090 ($52)

Need For Speed Most Wanted EA ¥7140 ($61)

FIFA 06 EA ¥7140 ($61)

Tetris The Grand Master Ace AQ Interactive/Arika ¥5040 ($43)

Xbox vs. Xbox360 Japan Launch By The Numbers

Xbox	Xbox 360
Price	
¥34,800 ($299)	¥37,900 ($325)
Release date	
2/22/02	12/10/05
Number of launch titles	
12	6
Units sold first weekend	
120,000	62,000
Number of people in line at Shinjuku Yodobashi Camera	
100	50
Number of Dead Or Alives available at launch	
1	0
Number of Bill Gates appearances on major daytime talkshows:	
1	0

龍が如く

TM

GAME REVIEW

Ryu Ga Gotoku

GTA in Tokyo? Shenmue with Yakuza? Not quite

It's finally happened. The GTA Effect has hit Japan. Western-targeted non-events like Beat Down and Urban Reign notwithstanding, Sega/Amusement Vision's Ryu Ga Gotoku ("Like A Dragon", but sounding far more pithy in Japanese for its use of a primarily literary form) represents the first Japanese-developed game clearly inspired by GTA's open-ended design and "mature" themes. Sure, Japanese GTA clones were inevitable — what makes this game so special? Should you even care? Oh yes. I think you should care a *lot*.

First things first. Despite appearances, Ryu Ga Gotoku is not Shenmue. Main character Kazuma Kiryu may resemble nothing so much as a grown-up Ryo Hazuki, and the aesthetic may seem similar, but aside from massive generalizations few comparisons can be drawn. Shenmue was defined by a suffocating freedom, almost absurd open-endedness, and a feeling of constantly racing against the clock... or, at the other extreme, twiddling your thumbs waiting for an event to happen. As much as I enjoyed Shenmue, the perfectly streamlined RGG reveals just how flawed Yu Suzuki's FREE game design was. In Ryu Ga Gotoku, time does not advance until the storyline dictates, so you have endless breathing room to pursue the nearly 80 optional missions without feeling like you're wasting valuable time. Further, you're never at a loss as to what to do to advance the main story; your next goal is helpfully indicated in both the menu screen and town map. Thank the heavens — no stumbling around pestering passersby with "Do you know where I can find some sailors?"

So we've established that RGG is not Shenmue. Is it GTA, perhaps? Much like that groundbreaking series, RGG is split into an overarching main plot which more or less must be followed, and innumerable, noncompulsory side-diversions. The entire scenario plays out in a sprawling nonlinear environment based heavily on reality. The similarities pretty much end there, however. Even though both works take place in their respective countries' underworlds and carry the highest video game rating that's financially viable, RGG's Kazuma is practically a saint compared to the protagonists of GTA. There's no random mugging, theft, carjacking, shaking down or murder in RGG — which isn't to say such things don't happen, only that they can't be pulled off of random citizens. No, Kazuma may be a tough-as-nails ex-Yakuza in a ¥500,000 suit, but all Gokudo (Yakuza) are meant to adhere to an ideal of jingi — honor and humanity — that prevent theft or other similar damaging acts to their community. This effectively limits your extracurricular activities to playing pachislot, gambling at underground casinos, helping people in need, getting busy with extremely pricey women at hostess bars, and, of course, beating up thugs who deserve it.

Ah yes. The beating...Ryu Ga Gotoku's finest gameplay feature. If you've played Spikeout, you've already played RGG. The battles in RGG don't resemble Spikeout, they *are* Spikeout. This should come as little surprise, since Toshihiro Nagoshi's Amusement Vision (also responsible for RGG) spent years refining that hugely entertaining series, only to see it peter out on Xbox. The fighting system is incredibly deep, and only becomes moreso as the game progresses. New techniques and moves can be learned in various ways — by using experience points gained in battle to electively power up three separate skill branches, Onimusha-style;

"As much as I enjoyed Shenmue, the perfectly streamlined RGG reveals just how flawed Yu Suzuki's FREE game design was."

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training with a wizened, homeless martial arts master; and occasionally finding martial arts manuals. This system is simultaneously fascinating and frustrating, as its structure introduces RGG's only major gameplay flaw: For the first third of the game, you don't have the ability to quickly attack behind you, and as such you'll frequently get pummeled from the opposite direction you're facing. The game *feels* like you should be able to combat this abuse, and you can...but you'll have to get through several hours of aggravating fight scenes first. Once the entire repertoire of moves becomes available, however, battles are genuinely fun and *powerfully* visceral, whether one-on-one or one-on-fifty. Kazuma's not just limited to his fists — a vast array of weaponry can be acquired, from katana, daggers, baseball bats, lead pipes, and pistols, to more esoteric tools like tasers, riot shields, and grenades. In addition, virtually every item not bolted down can be picked up and used as an impromptu battering ram: Stone lanterns, bicycles, coffee tables, potted plants. You'll have so much fun cold-cocking fools you won't even notice the 15 seconds of loading in and out of battle.

Ryu Ga Gotoku's gameplay is indeed almost criminally entertaining, but for my money the game's strongest point — and one truly deserving of praise — is its elaborately constructed story, created by bestselling crime novelist Seishu Hase. Impossible to encapsulate in a review like this, Hase's sprawling epic involves dozens of characters, Yakuza organizations, and businesses. RGG may at first seem to have a typical Yakuza movie setup, with protagonist Kazuma Kiryu taking the fall to protect his sworn brother, Akira Nishikiyama, from a murder rap and spending ten years in prison. Nishikiyama's crime wasn't just any run-of-the-mill slaying, however: He shot the leader of his own crime organization in a moment of passion, to prevent his and Kazuma's mutual childhood friend Yumi from being raped. Kazuma fully expects to be rubbed out for "his" crime of "patricide", but instead is merely excommunicated from the organization, and emerges from his decade-long prison sentence (relatively) unscathed. Why? Does someone want him alive? A clue comes in the form of a letter from the man he considers his father, crime boss Shintaro Kazama, who wants to see him immediately. It seems Yumi's gone missing, and Nishikiyama isn't quite the man he used to be. Oh, and there's the small matter of 10 billion missing yen (about $85 million) of the mob's money. The story's preamble is satisfyingly genre, and you'll see every Yakuza film convention lovingly recreated, from the pinkie-cutting to the classic aniki/kobun relationship. If you're familiar with the work of Seijun Suzuki, Kinji Fukasaku, Takeshi Kitano, or Takashi Miike, you'll feel right at home: Ryu Ga Gotoku feels like a love letter to the Yakuza eiga film genre. True aficionados can draw all sorts of connections — game scenarist Hase had one of his novels adapted for the screen by Miike, who directed the live-action RGG prequels viewable on the official site, and veteran genre actor Tetsuya Watari from Suzuki's legendary 1966 Tokyo Drifter portrays Shintaro Kazama. Ryu Ga Gotoku, however, is not just a Yakuza pastiche. Things really start to get interesting with the introduction of Haruka, a mysterious preteen girl from the same orphanage at which Kazuma, Nishikiyama and Yumi grew up. Tough-guy Kazuma forms a close paternal relationship with her, turning the genre on its ear. To say anything more, however, would ruin the exquisitely-woven tale.

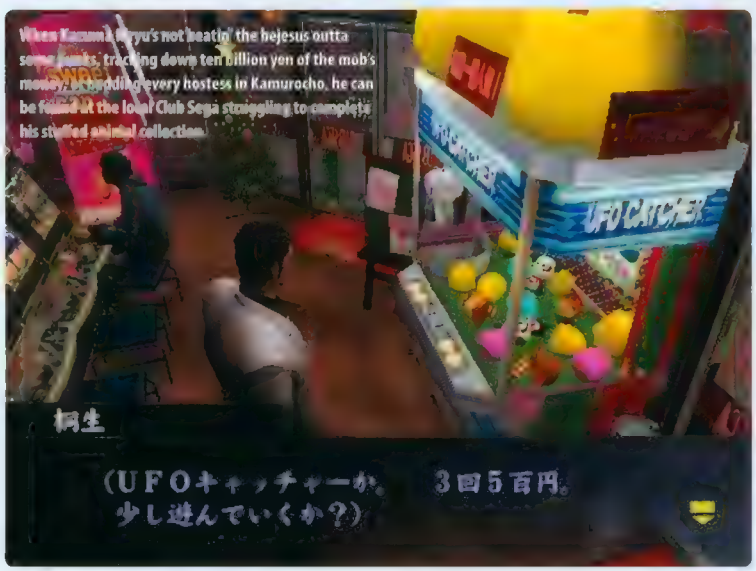
"I'd even go so far as to say it's Sega's best game of 2005."

All these words and still no mention of the sumptuous visuals. I ask you to interpret this as a compliment: Ryu Ga Gotoku is one of those increasingly-rare games that have their core — gameplay and story — come before visual flash. Yet this should not begin to suggest that RGG lacks in the graphical department. I'm running out of room, but a glance at any of the screenshots on these pages should make it plain that this is one of the most beautiful games the PlayStation 2 has ever seen. Of particular note are the night vistas of seedy Kamurocho, with dozens of individual passersby, and remarkably realistic light-blooms haloing the omnipresent neon. RGG also features the best lipsync I think I've ever seen in a realtime game, surpassing even that of Kingdom Hearts. There's very little, if anything, I can single out as a flaw in the visual or aural presentation of Ryu Ga Gotoku; both are world-class. This is Sega, after all.

But it seems I've prattled on too long. The scope of this game is vast, and I can't hope to but nick its surface in two pages. While it is certain that Ryu Ga Gotoku would not exist without Shenmue and Grand Theft Auto, it rises up to be much more than a sum of its parts. If you can't already tell, I feel it's something of a masterpiece. I'd even go so far as to say it's Sega's best game of 2005. In any case, it's simply too good to remain in Japan...though should Sega ever feel fit to gift us with a localization, I pray the stellar performances aren't replaced by a bunch of Saturday morning cartoon voice talent pretending to sound tough. In the meantime, if you can run imports and hang with all-Japanese dialogue (not to mention thick Yakuza patois), you owe it to yourself to experience Ryu Ga Gotoku. **Nick Des Barres**

Kamurocho VS. Kabukicho

Ryu Ga Gotoku's fictional setting, Kamurocho, is modeled *very* closely on the real-life Tokyo red-light district of Kabukicho, right down to the street layout. How accurate is Sega's reality synthesis? We ventured into the neon jungle to compare and contrast; judge for yourself.



When Kazuma Kiryu's not beatin' the hejesus outta some punks, tracking down ten billion yen of the mob's money, or cuddling every hostess in Kamurocho, he can be found at the local Club Sega struggling to complete his stuffed animal collection.

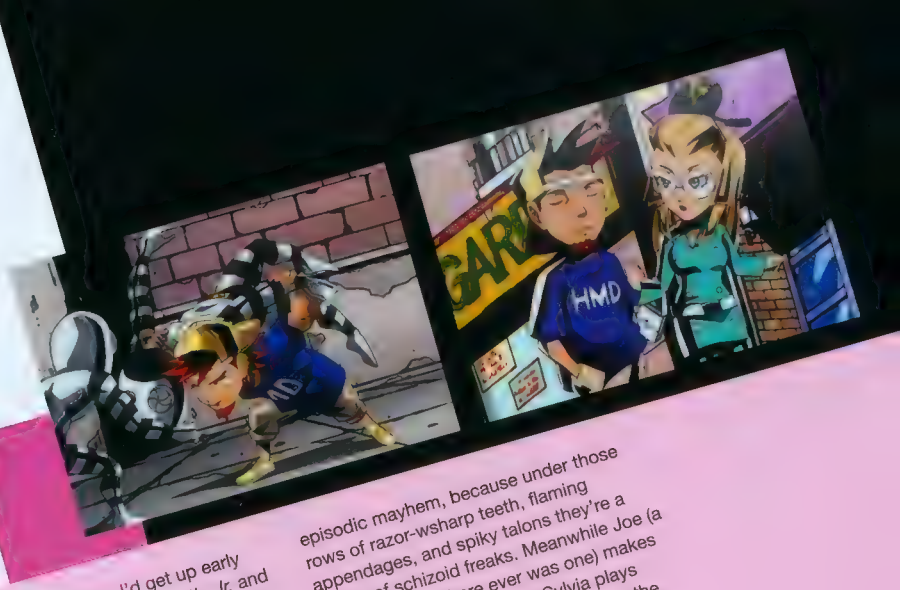
Ryu Ga Gotoku 9.5

+ Gripping story, rewardingly deep battle system, incredibly accurate recreation of Tokyo.
- Battle system unnecessarily tedious during first half of game, lengthy loading times in and out of combat.

Developer: Sega (Amusement Vision) **Publisher:** Sega
Online: None **Available:** Now Japan

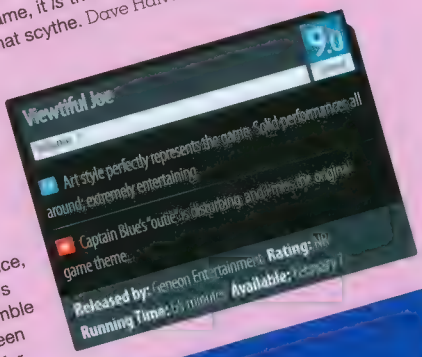
Viewtiful Joe

Super Dude



Recently, two series I'd get up early on a Saturday morning for (*Death, Jr.* and *Viewtiful Joe*) have been ushered down the anime red carpet, and while DJ is still in post, so far so good, because Group TAC and Geneon have done a spectacular job bringing Viewtiful Joe to animated life. By sticking to the game's basic premise while delving deeper into the series' colorful characters, V-Joe is *Boondocks*-cool yet kid-friendly. Forget that the localized version airs on Kids' WB; this is a universal anime experience, especially if you dig the game.

For one thing, we get to see the circumstances surrounding Joe and Sylvia's movie-going escapade (which shines new light on both characters) and Joe's subsequent ceremony with Blue, followed by a meet and greet with the best congregation of archenemies since the original Adam West Batman. Hulk Davidson, Charles III, Fire Leo, Gran Bruce, Alastor, and Sprocket (Almighty Leader's über-sexy assistant) make up an ensemble of evil that would make Lex Luthor green with envy. They're the perfect fodder for episodic mayhem, because under those rows of razor-wsharp teeth, flaming appendages, and spiky talons they're a bunch of schizoid freaks. Meanwhile Joe (a dude's dude if there ever was one) makes the aloof seem astute and Sylvia plays the ultimate damsel in distress. Even the fighting is dutiful to the cause—utilizing animated mach speed and slow over panning stills—as they work in all of the key play mechanics by the end of episode 2. The art is on par too—It's not like the game, it is the game. DJ better sharpen up that scythe. Dave Halverson


Viewtiful Joe
9.0
Art style perfectly represents the game. Solid performances all around, extremely entertaining.
Captain Blues outfit is disgusting, and mimics the original game theme.
Released by: Geneon Entertainment Rating: NR
Running Time: 55 minutes Available: February

"...an ensemble of evil that would make Lex Luthor green with envy."

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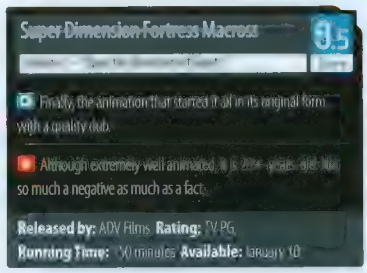
Super Dimension Fortress

MACROSS

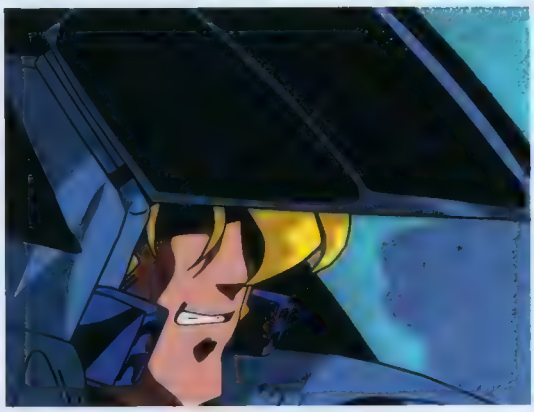
Still Super

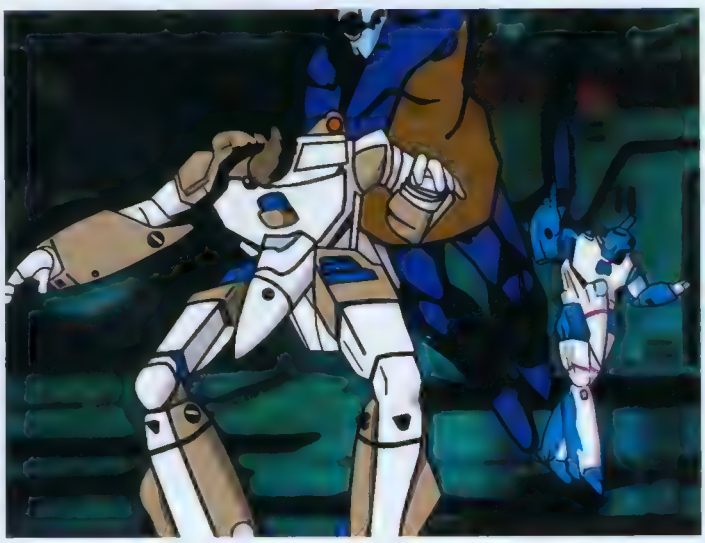
Chances are that if you're even remotely familiar with anime or significant moments in animation you're familiar with *Macross*, a.k.a. *Robotech*—the American version cobbled together using the three original Japanese series that until now have only been available Stateside in Japanese language with poorly dubbed subtitles, making ADV's sterling reissue a significant milestone that no animation fan should be without. Offered up here uncut and digitally restored with a faithful English dub and Dolby 5.1 surround sound, this is as pure a look at the legend as you will ever get, and having seen the original more times than I care to admit, I can attest, it is a marked improvement. Events get underway in 1999 ironically enough (I suppose in the early '80s that seemed like "the future"), when an alien vessel with technology far superior to our own comes crashing to Earth. Fast forward 10 years and an entire economy has risen up around the wreckage, along with derivative technology called Valkyries—the archetype for transforming robots, now a beacon of equality in the universal frontier. On the day of its maiden flight, however, tragedy strikes, and our finest hour turns into our darkest, as the Macross' long dormant systems mysteriously come to life and fire on a hovering armada sending the merciless Zentradi forces down upon us, and the war is on. Close your eyes kids; people die in older animation. It will all be over soon enough... at least until Volume 2 erupts.

Aside from its obvious strides in cell animation (the 100% handmade production is humbling to behold, especially in contrast to the more sterile digital animation so prevalent today), the more I watch *Macross* the more I realize how influential it was on so many of today's prominent directors. If imitation is the highest form of flattery, *Macross* should be beet red. Dave Halverson



"...a significant milestone that no animation fan should be without."





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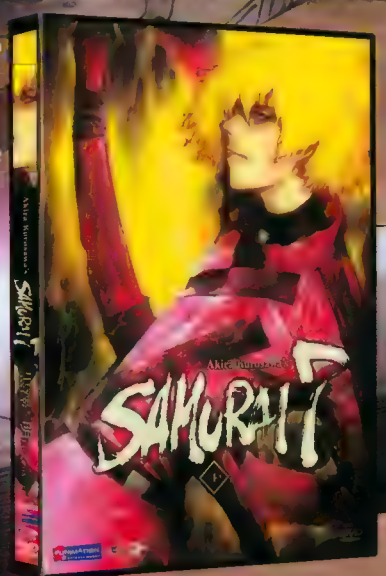

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anime essentials

must-have anime, manga & music

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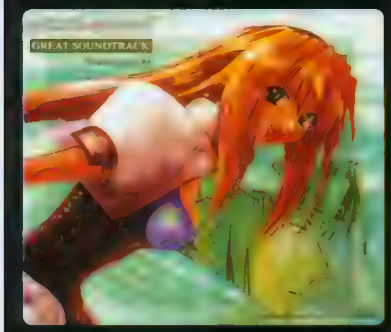
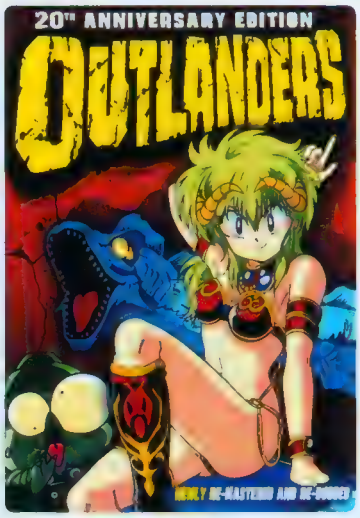


Geneon Anime OSTs

Released by: Geneon Anime Music

Excel Saga Great Soundtrack Experiment 2, Love Hina Again, Madlax OST 2, and Para Para Max US Mix 2 are just a few of the latest (and greatest—especially Para Para) anime soundtracks from Geneon. Make this the year you discover the magic of anime OSTs at Geneonanimemusic.com. Gratuitous plug or not? You be the judge.

watch this



Outlanders 20th Anniversary Ed.

Released by: Central Park Media **Rating:** 16 and up

As busty, scantily clad space princesses go, Kahm is among the most versatile and user-friendly. Check out CPM's re-dubbed and re-mastered 20th Anniversary Edition of Outlanders and see for yourself.

Dead Leaves

Released by: Manga Entertainment **Rating:** 16 and up

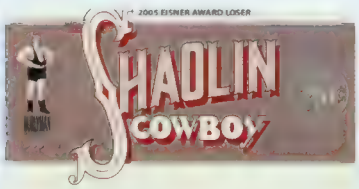
Dead Leaves is now available on UMD…so you really need a PSP right now. If you buy one non-game UMD this has to be it. There's simply nothing on par with the joy DL brings… Well okay, FLCL; but that's it.

Zatch Bell

Released by: Viz Media **Rating:** All ages

Now Playing: Volume 1

Boy genius Kiyo was bored with the world until dad got him a lightning boy from another world in a dress. Even stranger is that Zatch (said boy) isn't alone, and the spells begin to fly. Hogwarts wouldn't have 'em. Too bad this is straight from the TV animation though. Unedited version please!



Shaolin Cowboy

Released by: BurlyMan **Art and Story:** Andy and Larry Wachowski

The Wachowskis have lost their collective minds—and were smart to put it on paper. I had to scrape my jaw off the floor after issue 4 of Shaolin Cowboy. Put it on your to-do list. Still only 350¢.

The Four Constables

Released by: Comics One

Art: Andy Seto **Director:** Tony Wong

When it comes to full-color manga (with spot varnished covers no less), The Four Constables is the most royal in pedigree. Not only is it one of the most compelling mystical adventures you will ever read, but the art and color are simply exquisite.

play & read this

Maes Hughes
Look, can you believe how big Elicia's gotten? She can even ride a tricycle now... She follows me everywhere on that thing-like my own escort of cuteness.

Edward Elric
Yep... You're the same as ever Major: nice and insane.

Maes Hughes
I've got more pictures. Want to see?

Roy Mustang
I'm going to become the Führer, Maes. I'll transform how this whole country runs... It's the only way I can justify taking my next breath.

Maes Hughes
To do that, you're gonna need someone who understands you and the system, and supports you from inside. I'll work under you, stay close to the higher-ups, and help push you to the top.

Maes Hughes
If this faction wants to motivate people into making the Philosopher's Stone, why would they cause so much destruction, starting the rumor that anyone who gets close to it will die?

Maes Hughes
Besides... if it's really coming from the inside, there's a good chance our line's been tapped. Sorry, but I still have to check on something.

Gracia Hughes
Just... be careful.

Maes Hughes
Daddy has a lot of work to do. Bye Bye.

volume 7 Available January 10, 2006

www.fullmetalalchemist.com

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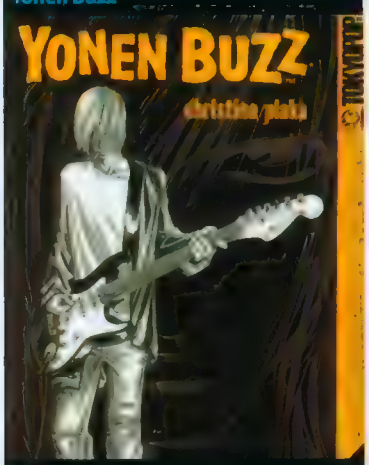
NOW READING

the wonderful world of manga

Yonen Buzz



Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Drama/Romance
Rating: 13+ **Story and Art:** Christina Plaka

Yonen Buzz chronicles the daily struggles of an up-and-coming rock band, Plastic Chew, at the apex of their garage days trying to make it big on talent rather than giving in to the trappings of the Top-40. Complicating things, the nucleus of the 4-piece band, guitar/vocalists Jun and Sayuri, are in love, and at odds: Sayuri has succumbed to working to put herself through school in case the band never makes it, while Jun remains committed. All the while, personal messages from the author abound. B+

Read it if: Love rock but loathe the process that made the likes of Ashley Simpson famous.

Infinite Ryvius

Publisher: Comics One **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Drama/Sci-Fi
Rating: 13+ **Story:** Hajime Yatate **Author:** Shinsuke Kurihashi

Based on the anime rather than the other way around, Infinite Ryvius takes some detours but for the most part sticks to the Lord of the Flies-like struggle aboard a space ship/safe haven (the Ryvius) where a faction of astronauts-in-training are stranded on the edge of space known as "the Geduld." The emphasis is on brothers Kouji and Yuki Aiba, whose opposing views will either be their death or salvation, until things take a major twist when they discover the secret of the Ryvius. B-

Read it if: Deep, character-driven space operas keep you glued to the porcelain bowl.

Sengoku Nights

Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Horror
Rating: 13+ **Story and Art:** Kei Kusunoki & Kaoru Ohashi

What a wonderful slice of Japanese mythology this is; about a boy, Masanoshi Kurozuka, who discovers that he's the reincarnation of a wicked woman who sold her soul during Japan's warring era: Oni-Hime. It's a lot to digest, especially when legions of the undead she had slain are attacking the women around him. When Masanoshi snaps and finally directs the ghouls to his devil inside, he meets his master and the gates of hell are swung wide open. Not a great way to make friends in high school. B+

Read it if: You've been waiting to see this premise devoid of comedy. This is *horror*.

Dark Edge

Publisher: Comics One **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Horror/Comedy
Rating: 13+ **Story and Art:** Yu Aikawa

After his mother's death, Kurou Takagi is suddenly transferred to a new school run by his father, whom he was told died before he was born, but his first day is anything but ordinary. When a girl we see die turns up in class and then "up" in class like a gooey hive waiting to consume her best friend, Kurou realizes there's more to dad's campus than meets the eye, and to the golden rule of never getting caught on campus after dark... Of course, he does soon after and the tentacles fly. B

Read it if: You like that hot coeds, zombies, decapitations, and soul-eating demons can be funny.

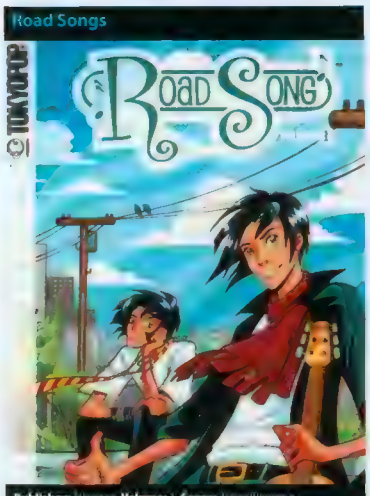
Kamui

Publisher: Broccoli Books **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Fantasy
Rating: 13+ **Story and Art:** Ajimomo

In the beginning, humans and spirits coexisted in the world and worked together towards a harmonious existence, until humans discovered science and abandoned their spirituality; a betrayal they would later pay for... They were the biggest earthquakes the world had ever seen and the casualties were immeasurable. The people that were left formed their own societies but only one faction, an organized group of kids called the NOA, could take down the giant monsters that now roam the earth, wielding the power of the Kamui. This is one you must see and read for yourself. It's like a Treasure game you read. The art is so Sin and Punishment I may have to get a tattoo. A

Read it if: Losing yourself in exquisite character design and godly sci-fi sounds like a great way to spend an afternoon.

Road Songs

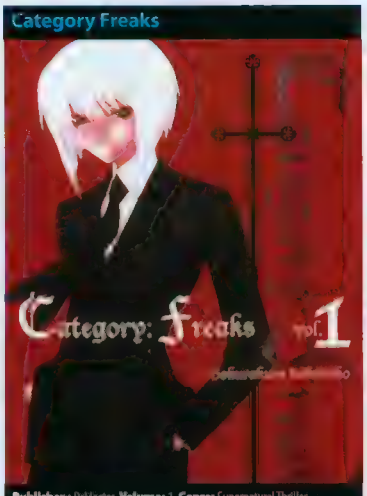


Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Romance
Rating: 13+ **Story:** Allan Gross **Art:** Ikuma Ozora

When musicians Monty and Simon decided to do a duet at the wedding for their respective family members, the last thing they imagined was somebody blowing up the yacht and both of their families in the process. To make matters worse, their grief is cut short when they overhear the ruthless female cop-on-the-take who did the job, earning them the top spot on her to-kill list after she makes sure they're the prime suspects. On the lam they go, headlong into a buddy epic with hazardous curves. A

Read it if: You wish Blake Edwards was young again and still making these movies.

Category Freaks



Publisher: DrMaster **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Supernatural Thriller
Rating: 18+ **Story and Art:** Gokurakuin Sakurako

In the world according to Category: Freaks, the reasons for "freak" accidents really are freaks, as in evil spirits that feed off of human weaknesses and desires, possessing a human host and manifesting their deepest darkest thoughts. Nanami Paranormal Investigations, made up of "Stands" (a freak's natural enemy) specialize in smoking out these specters and devouring them, feeding their lost souls to their tiny female operative, Tokiko, who just loves to snack on them and then let out a petit belch. B

Read it if: You might like Law and Order occult style, with more sex but sans any trials (everyone's guilty).

Juror 13

Publisher: Tokyopop **Volume:** [illegible] **Genre:** Action
Rating: [illegible] **Story:** D.J. Milky **Art:** Makoto Nakamura

From the moment Jerry Rosen gets a jury summons, every aspect of his life begins to not only come apart, but shatter... His fiancée leaves him, his best friend Jake seems to be setting him up, and his job as an insurance adjuster is getting freaky, to say the least. The questions why run deep, leading up to a climax that makes Juror 13 quite unlike any graphic novel you've probably ever read. Getting into any specifics would kill the story. B

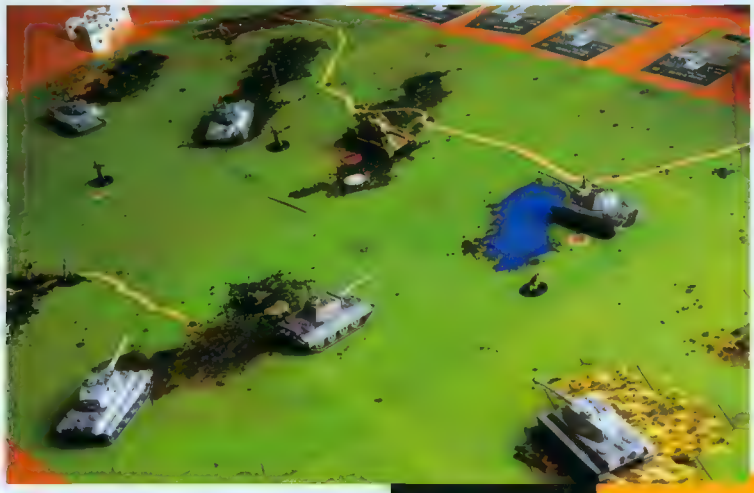
Read it if: You like reading on the edge of your seat.

Wizards of the Coast

Time to get board

Ever venture into your local comic shop and wonder what the frack all those people at card tables are doing? Well, I did, and so I did what any other hard-working entertainment journalist would do (during the holidays when the games dry up) and went directly to the source, Wizards of the Coast, who wasted no time in bringing me up to speed on all things trading-card game, or as we people in the know call them—TCGs. A trading card game is a game played using a specially designed set of cards, the first of which was created in 1993 by a mathematician by the name of Dr. Richard Garfield. Wizards of the Coast wasted no time securing a patent on TCGs (the first awarded of its kind) which soon after exploded with the debut of Pokemon and has since become most popular among 18-34 year old males. How big is it? Well, cards are denoted as common, uncommon, and rare with the rare cards featuring more powerful play mechanics. One such card—a rare Black Lotus—recently sold for 20,000...so pretty big. And Magic: The Gathering continues to gain popularity. The annual pro tour awards over 3,000,000 in cash and prize money annually and the future looks bright...in a dark ages sort of way.

The big draw? Well, I can only liken it to a real-time, point blank war sitting opposite your enemy for the ultimate trash talking, although, I found the CMGs (collectible miniature games) much more compelling. Basically an RTS where you play the controller. CMGs feature prepainted plastic miniatures sold in randomized "booster packs" with individual figures having varying degrees of rarity. I recently spotted a massive Gundam CMG from Japan at the San Francisco Metreon that had me fogging up the window like a bum outside a bakery, although, the current big things here are Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, D&D of course, and Axis and Allies (although someone ought to license Kingdom Under Fire). For these purposes, WotC sent me Monsters Menace America, a 2-4 player game where you control giant monsters rampaging their way cross-country crushing everything in their path from tourist attractions to military bases until another monster invades their (your) space, in which it's time to call out the military—your military—to crush them. Send in the Marines or Air Force, dabble in "Military Research," mutate, and even heal. It's like King of Monsters meets Military Madness. Not that I'd spend my weekend penned up in a comic shop, but when it comes to family gatherings, to hell with Monopoly. Toxicor and I have a major bone to pick.



The big news for TCG players right now is Hecatomb, a new mature-audiences game where players join the forces of corruption, deceit, and destruction, forging vile creatures for your own personal apocalypse, ultimately calling on deities such as Set, Loki, or Cthulhu to do in the human realm. Once the barrier between the worlds is cracked, surges in violence, military conflict, disease, disaster, and utter social breakdown enter into the game, making this by far the most mature TCG created to date, the art of which is especially noteworthy: These are some pretty serious cards. For more information on TCGs and CMGs, www.wizards.com has information on all of the above along with store locations, product libraries, etc.

The way I see it, every now and again it's good to break away from the virtual world and have some actual human interaction and we all know what a drag those adult play dates can be. So why not shake them up with a little mayhem. Nothing brings people together like an evening of pain, suffering, and Armageddon. Earnest Storm

"Not that I'd spend my weekend penned up in a comic shop, but when it comes to family gatherings, to hell with Monopoly"

Like a real-life King of Monsters, Monster Mayhem is best played barking out your own sound effects...

The Island

Starring: Scarlett Johansson, Ewan McGregor, Djimon Hounsou
Director: Michael Bay
Released By: Dreamworks
Rated: R

When it's working, which is barely and rarely, Michael Bay's hyper-active sci-fi thriller *The Island* handles its weighty theme with an intelligence the director normally bypasses. But even in those more solemn moments, the story is suffocated by Bay's insistence for showy direction and overwrought style. The movie stars the likeable pair of Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson, who are brought up in a genetically engineered society where the outside world is nothing but a distant fantasy. They gradually begin to question their upbringing and the clinical walls that imprison them, taking the overstuffed movie into a second-half bonanza of chase scenes and familiar Bay anxiety attacks as the heroes make their run for freedom. I actually enjoyed some of the special-effects shootouts and exciting climax, but The Island simply can't wrestle its good ideas away from the stylistic overkill that becomes more tiring by the picture. Brady Fiechter **Movie: C- Extras: C**

The Brothers Grimm

Starring: Matt Damon, Heath Ledger, Jonathan Pryce, Peter Stormare, Lena Headey, Monica Belluci
Directed by: Terry Gilliam
Released By: Dimension Home Video
Rated: PG-13

I've never met a Terry Gilliam movie I didn't like. Even off of his tilted game, as he is here—obviously trying hard to do the Weinstein shuffle—his trademark lunacy still bleeds through enough to draw you into his sinister vision of *Grimm*. The approach is certainly a sound one. Prop up a couple of well known ringers (ultimate shape shifter Damon and Heath Ledger who finds a wonderful stooge) to draw in the target demo and then blindside us with brilliantly crude performances by Gilliam alumni Jonathan Pryce, whose French General conjures visions of John Cleese, and Peter Stormare who steals every scene he's in and a few he's not as an Italian officer come executioner who likes to punt kitties into human food processors. Someone get that man a Ritalin. Loosely based on the lives of the legendary storytellers before they were published, the overall gist is a vanilla one by Gilliam standards—okay, it's *Ghostbusters*—but that doesn't stop his wonderful "Enchanted Forest" from drawing us in with its shifting trees, resident beasts and magical tower where the best bits of the movie unfold like a gothic Cirque Du Soleil. Dave Halverson **Movie: B Extras: B**

Dark Water

Starring: Jennifer Connelly, Ariel Gade, Dougray Scott
Director: Walter Salles
Released By: Buena Vista
Rated: PG-13

While a capable upgrade from the tedious psychological horrors of the original *Dark Water*, this visually interesting remake still can't survive the same boring plot structure and strained attempts for natal symbolism. Centering the film with a strong performance is Jennifer Connelly, who plays an unstable, recently divorced mother struggling with a shady husband and a life that has been painfully rearranged. Moving herself and her young daughter into a horribly dilapidated apartment complex, the pair are tormented by a ghost-child who, it would seem, lives above them. As the rain ominously falls outside and a water stain grows on the ceiling in the daughter's bedroom, we're more curious than tense to find the source of all the alluded horror.
Brady Fiechter
Movie: C+ Extras: B-

Polar Express

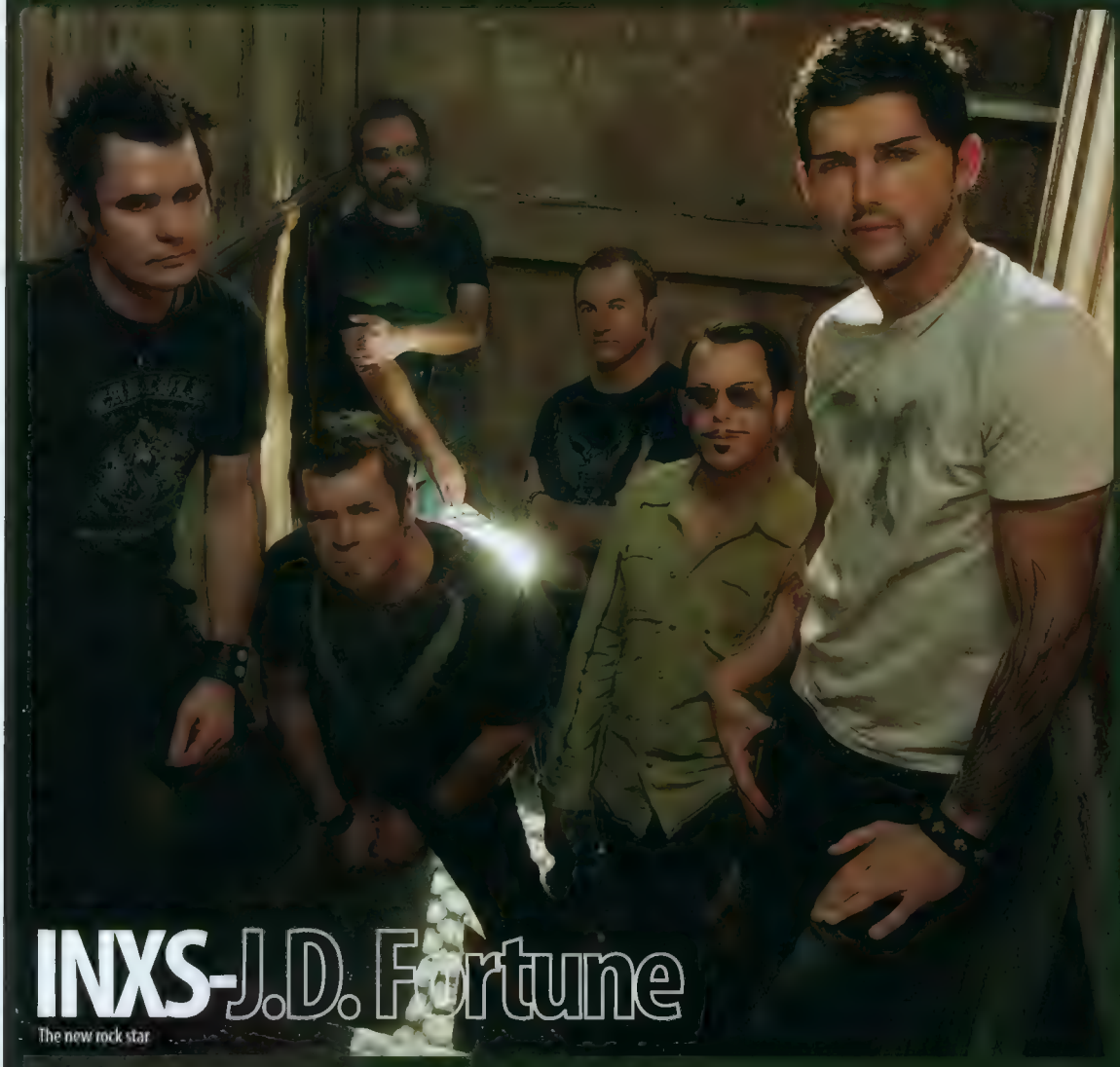
Starring: Tom Hanks, Michael Jeter, Eddie Deezen
Directed by: Robert Zemeckis
Released By: Warner Home Video
Rated: Not Rated

Polar Express worked visual magic in all its engulfing, 3D spectacle on IMAX, but as a home-theater release, there's a deflated quality to it all. The movie is based on Chris Van Allsburg's children's book, which tells the story of a young boy who takes a journey on a magical train into the heart of the North Pole. Like the best tales of its kind, a simple beauty underlies the age-old messages of faith and friendship, but it's the look of the film that both captures the imagination—and gets a little distant and creepy. Skilled director Robert Zemeckis used a process called performance capture to replicate live-actors and their movements in the digital world. The results are hit and miss, impressing at times yet sucking the characters of warmth and subtle emotions. Brady Fiechter
Movie: B- Extras: NA

4 Brothers

Starring: Mark Wahlberg, Tyrese Gibson, Andre Benjamin
Director: John Singleton
Released By: Paramount
Rated: R

Director John Singleton returns to the harsh streets in Four Brothers, an entertaining revenge movie that recalls his *Boyz N the Hood* days, only with a lot less to say and a lot less impact. The movie follows a group of motley brothers who go after the killers of their mother, who's gunned down on her trip to the market. Strong actors elevate a light script, leaving the crude chaos to fill in the rest of the rather low-profile gaps.
Brady Fiechter
Movie: B- Extras: C+



INXS-J.D. Fortune

The new rock star

By Steven Douglas Losey

J.D. Fortune epitomizes what a rock star should be, could be and would be. Quicker than you can say RockStar INXS, his magnetism, his swagger his vocal chops and his stage presence won the Canadian singer bragging rights as the lead singer with the band INXS. The beauty of it all is that INXS wasn't some garage band made for TV. This is a group that has sold thirty million records and scored number one songs in four different continents—something very fortunate for Mr. Fortunate. Fortune doesn't hold his tongue. He doesn't fold to political correctness. What he does do is tell it like it is and strive to keep it real. He recently participated in X-BOX Live on January 17th, where he took on gun-toting challengers via Halo 2. Now Fortune sits in Australia preparing for holiday as he and his mates rehearse for their upcoming tour.

play: Earlier in the competition did you want to bash anyone in the face? - Oh yeah, man, there are a few people there that I could have lived without. I wasn't particularly fond of Heather and Daphna, nothing against woman, but they were just the cackling duo like the Macbeth Witch's minus one. I could have done without all the crying. I walked in one day and two guys were crying. One was rubbing the other one's shoulders and they were both sobbing in tears. It was like 'what the .....'

Are you naming names? - Well, let's just say one was a hair-raising performer and the other was a hot bogey on my tail.

What was the moment that you said, "this baby's mine"? - I think it was right after I sang *What You Need*. It was the very last thing that I did. It just felt right. We just felt like a band on stage. I'd watched Marty's performance with the band and it was more like the Marty Casey show. I mean, such is life. He's that type of personality, so all the power to him, but when you're in a band, that's what it is, a *band* effort.

How does a cat from 2006 mesh with a band started in the 80's? - There are a couple ingredients there. One, the songs in the back catalog are really relevant today. We always have war, we always have homelessness, and famine and disease, and those topics transcend time, unfortunately. The other ingredient is that music's a language. If you're nine or ninety and speak it fluently, you're able to carry on a coherent conversation. To be honest with you, I find it hard to keep up with those guys. They're the hardest working band in show business. They've actually set my standards higher.

What's the deal with your prominent tattoos (forearms) that say, "Human Beings"? - What happened was, I was at this party, but I just got a job writing music for a kids TV show. I cancelled out on my first writing session because I was at this party. I was just hung over and I couldn't go in. I lied and I said there was a death in the family. I told them it was my Grandfather. What happened was, three weeks to the day my Grandfather died, pretty much in my arms. One of the last things he said to me before he died was, 'always be a human being.' That's why it's on there. I'm earning each one of those letters as I go.

> "I think all art comes from suffering. I mean, suffering is creation. On the other hand, you need gratitude as well. I think art is the combination of the two..."

That's something to strive for dude, really cool. - I had to tell my Grandma the same thing I just told you. It was pretty rough.

Do you think you have to go through those kinds of trials to make good music? - I think all art comes from suffering. I mean, suffering is creation. On the other hand, you need gratitude as well. I think art is a combination of the two, being grateful for your suffering, I guess, and learning. Everybody's artistically inclined in their own way, whatever they do. Whether it's building balls out of rubber bands or being mathematically or mechanically inclined—whatever you love to do, if you can find a way to do it for a living, you'll never work a day in your life. There's an art to every skill. Writing music is just an extension. It's another facet, another medium of art.

What do you bring to the table as a human being?- I think some key ingredients like honesty and integrity. I've got my act together at 32. If this would have happened when I was 20 I'd probably be dead or in jail. I bring possibility. I bring a new beginning. For them, they make me feel really talented. They've upped the standards for me.

What do you bring to the table musically? - Some street sense, some edge. From what I've been told by a lot of the crew they've had with them is that it's been a long time since a lot of these guys have smiled and laughed. We just friggin laugh all day long. We're loving it. It's just amazing. Some of the things that come out of our mouth would be great for a family show. **play**

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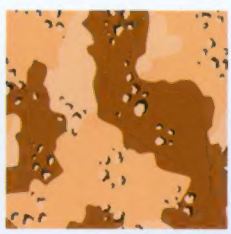

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PlayStation 2

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